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Kapsula

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One the cover: Documenation of Encomium by Brendan Fernandes (2015) Photograph by Henry Chan

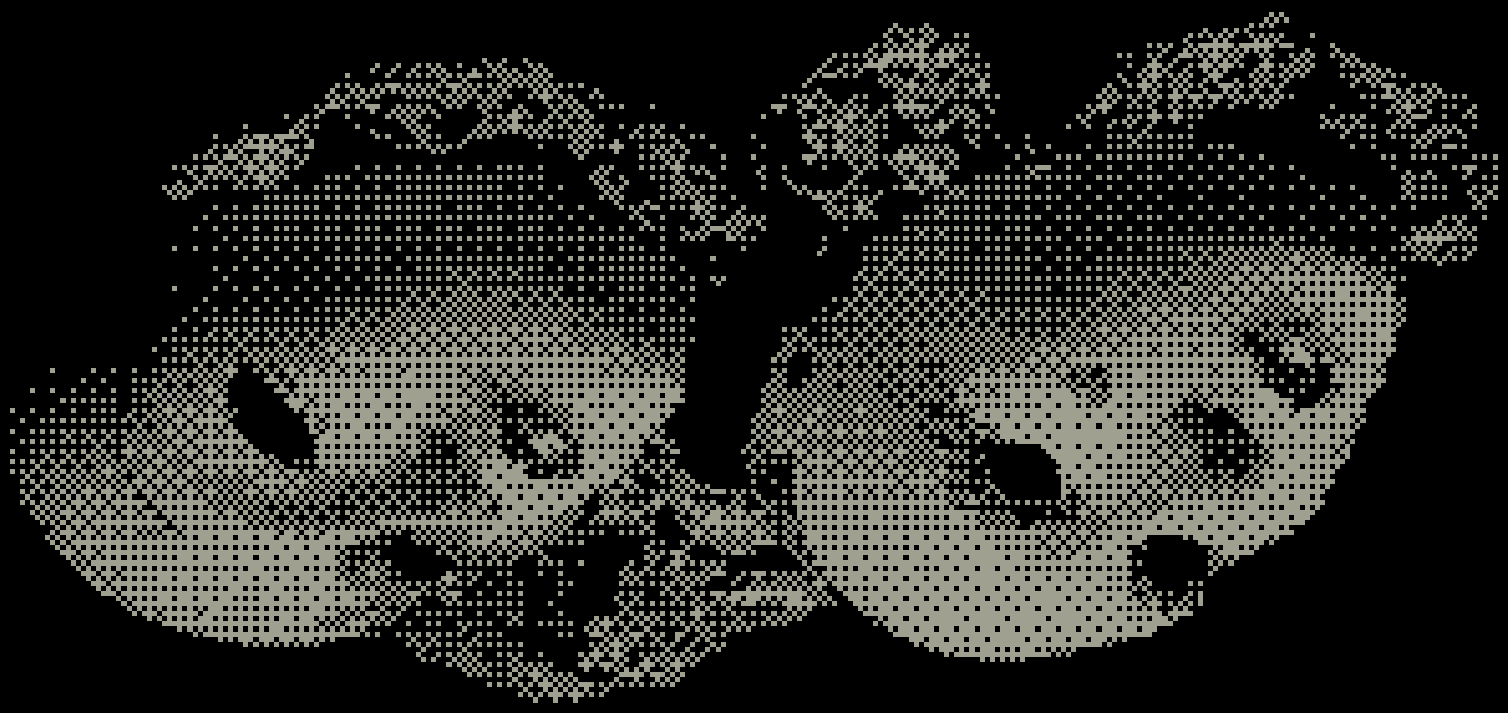
SEPTEMBER 2015

A Special Issue with OCAD University

MULTIPLE LI(V)ES OF ART/ISTS &...

DISCIPLINARY FUZZINESS AND THE FUTURE(S) OF ART CRITICISM

Selections from the 2015 Conference of the Contemporary Art, Design and New Media Art Histories Masters Program



KAPSULA

Special Issue

MULTIPLE LI(V)ES OF ART/ISTS &... DISCIPLINARY FUZZINESS & THE FUTURE(S) OF ART CRITICISM

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This special issue of KAPSULA collects materials from the March 2015 graduate conference at OCAD University for the Contemporary Art, Design and New Media Histories Masters Program. Contents were created in collaboration between KAPSULA PRESS and the 2015 Graduate Conference Committee.

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Documenation of *Encomium* by Brendan Fernandes (2015)
Photograph by Henry Chan

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Introduction:

TRACING ART'S EDGES

by
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(2015 Graduate Conference Committee, OCAD University)

This issue of KAPSULA collects materials from the March 2015 graduate conference at Ontario College of Art and Design University. We, the organizers of the conference, make up the graduating cohort of the Contemporary Art, Design, and New Media Art Histories program at the University. When we first explored possible topics for this conference, we were hampered by both the wide breadth of our interests (as suggested by the lengthy title of our program), and our sense, conversely, of a limited space for new ways of engaging with art—a problem as old as Ecclesiastes', "There's nothing new under the sun!" Our common ground—a shared interested in interdisciplinary practices—offered potential, but we felt that not enough attention was given to the boundaries that become blurred through interdisciplinarity and the ways that these boundaries might be invisible to traditional modes of criticism. Tracing those boundaries might, we felt, lead to a productive new terrain for critical engagement.

Multiple Li(v)es... is premised on the proposition and exploration of art's edges in an interdisciplinary context of research and production. The programming included academic and artist presentations, as well as several performances, which together prompted questions about the roles of the artist, art critic, curator, and art historian in light of shifting disciplinary and sociological boundaries in artistic practice.

Our logo for this conference was stylized as

~~Multiple~~ Li(v)es of Art/ists &...

The text version of this logo deliberately appears as a kind of draft, incomplete and impossible to pin down to one verbal reading. The animated logo created by Jenn Snider and used on the conference blog traces the transformations applied to the logo as we initially drafted the conference name. These frequent (re)decisions make Multiple Li(v)es difficult to discuss in conversation (each organizer tended to favor an individual way of referring to the conference) but mirror the conference's focus on emergence and ongoing dialogue. From the choice to select not one epigraph for the conference but several, selected and displayed on our blog at random through code, to the choice to introducing multiple roundtables and workshops where the intellectual content of the conference would emerge in the moment, Multiple Li(v)es was designed to develop dynamically and continue its development beyond the conference's end.

This issue of KAPSULA represents both a trace of the conference proceedings and a part of its continued development. We have selected a number of works presenting, documenting, or responding to elements of the conference. While tracing art's edges held central importance to the conference, the presenters explored this idea through several, quite different approaches.

Some projects sought to grapple with materials on arts edges and articulated the problems of performing critical analysis on such outlier works. This can be seen in Anastasia Howe Bukowski's tracing of the relations in "King (A Portrait of Michael Jackson)," Victoria Mohr-Blakeney's discussion of the challenges of writing about the embodied art of dance, and Alison Cooley's experiment in high-intensity critical art blogging. This aspect of the conference is taken up by the first of our two keynotes, Dr. Sarah Thornton, who engages the art world ethnographically. Thornton, the author of 33 Artists in 3 Acts and Seven Days in the Art World, has established a practice that takes contemporary art as her field of study, drawing upon both the social science tradition and modes of literary nonfiction, with individual artists positioned as protagonists and antagonists within the narrative of the text.

If Dr. Sarah Thornton positions the artists in her writing as performers, actors upon the metaphoric stage of the art world, conference keynote performer Brendan Fernandes engages with the stage of the everyday through literal, bodily performance. His performance work "Encomium," presented on opening night, blurred disciplinary boundaries and spurred discussions about art as a mode of critical engagement. This tendency appears, too, in the intervention on the conference by Rebecca Noone, whose "Cues for Living" cards were introduced to the conference space as part of an ongoing project tracing the connections between science and philosophy. The workshops by Daniel Marrone, who explored the critical potential of doodles and Christian Siroyt, who brought a heterogeneous archive of rare books to the conference for use as objects of consideration and inspiration, also activated a notion of engagement with affective forms of research using familiar methods and materials.

These highlighted tendencies to offer, through traditional means, proposals for engagement with art's edges, and to introduce new methods of engagement, resulted in a complex and dynamic conference experience that we have tried to echo in this issue of KAPSULA. Because our conference was fundamentally focused on breaking away from traditional academic conference structures—to parallel the concept of disciplinary fuzziness/liminal spaces—we also envisioned for this issue to depart from linear confines of academic papers. Just as the conference was characterized by a mix of traditional paper presentations and non-traditional workshops and roundtables, this issue of KAPSULA contains both traditional academic papers as well as transcripts and image essays: a multitude, a multiplicity, of critical forms.

If contemporary art and culture are characterized by multiplicity, methods of criticism should be equally multiple. We hope to present a collection of intellectual technologies that might be mobilized, transferred, reworked, and mutated in countless ways. Through the introduction of diverse, even heterodox, methodologies, we offer a view into the spectral realm of these multiple traces.

Multiple lives, multiple lies, and…

OBSERVATION AS CRAFT

Notes on a Conversation with Sarah Thornton

Francisco-Fernando Granados

This past spring, OCAD University welcomed ***Dr. Sarah Thornton*** *to kick off the conference proceedings with a discussion of her practice writing about art and artists, and some of the many lives and lies in the world of contemporary art today.*

What follows is a profile of Dr. Thornton's conversation with ***Francisco-Fernando Granados*** *in which he reflects on Thornton's recent book and her process as a writer, researcher, and ethnographer of art and artists. A video of this conversation is* ***available here.***

The multiple lives of artists are caught in a double bind, somewhere between the privilege of mobility and self-making, and the vulnerability of kinship and self-exposure. Dr. Sarah Thornton's latest book, *33 Artists in 3 Acts* (2014) engages the double bind, presenting the lives of artists as a stage where carefully crafted characters negotiate their position in relationship to the hierarchical social system of the art world. The book weaves together accounts of conversations with artists—including Jeff Koons, Martha Rosler, Gabriel Orozco, Wangechi Mutu, and Andrea Fraser—in rhythmic and entertaining narratives supported by detailed observation and multidisciplinary research. These narratives provide insight into large-scale events like the Venice Biennial, where art finds itself collapsing into mass media, as well as more intimate moments of reflection in the artists' homes and studios. Thornton's narrative drive directs her subjects to the simple but extremely complex question that fuels the project: *what is an artist?* Thornton arranges the variety of answers and reactions to this question into three sections that highlight the political, relational, and technical dimensions of these artists' lives. The multiplicity of perspectives in the book contours the figure

of the artist in terms of what Fraser, speaking to Thornton, proposes as an "instance of the possible" (Thornton 2014, 337).

In conversation, Thornton commented that since Duchamp and his claim to the readymade, art has become more like a belief system—proposing that credibility and confidence are qualities that underpin the possibility of this belief. This belief serves both a break from and a continuation of the modernist myth of the genius, creating a new, often patriarchally-inclined roster of iconic figures such as Duchamp, who is still referenced decades after his death. Like Duchamp, there are other characters in absentia that play a supporting role in *33 Artists*. Some are referenced as a means to develop the main characters, but there are others that feel more *influential*. Tammy Rae Carland remembers Felix Gonzalez-Torres by saying that it wasn't just his work, but his personality that made him attractive as a thinker. The evidence of an artist's power to turn, not everything, but potentially anything into an artwork reminds the reader of the incalculability of aesthetics. There aren't many professions where it is your job to figure out what to do. Architects don't have that freedom. Doctors don't have that luxury. Bureaucrats aren't supposed to be able to dream of it.

And yet there are boundaries for artists. In Canada, these boundaries are in place to help determine who may or may not have access to public funds in order to support their work. According to ***the Canada Council***, an artist is somebody who:

- has specialized training in the artistic field (not necessarily in academic institutions)
- is recognized as a professional by his or her peers (artists working in the same artistic tradition)
- is committed to devoting more time to artistic activity, if possible financially
- has a history of public presentation

To meet the definition of a professional visual artist, you must also have:

- produced an independent body of work
- had at least three public exhibitions of your work in a professional context over a three-year period
- maintained an independent professional practice for at least three years after specialized training

Some of us experience the lives of artists not only as our own, those of our peers and friends, but also as teachers. In this case, the difference between the incalculable field of aesthetic experience and the institutional boundaries that determine the artist as subject presents another double bind: How do we teach students to delve deep into unpredictable processes, where learning is only possible through failure, while having a chance to succeed professionally? Indeed, what is it that an artist can teach another artist?

In the last section of her book, Thornton defends the often-dismissed importance of craft by expanding its definition to include the rehearsal and bodily preparation of performance artists like Fraser or Marina Abramović. The book also provides an account of the grueling editing sessions Christian Marclay put himself through in the making of his 24-hour film collage *The Clock* (2010). Although not an artist, Thornton's own methodology of research and approach to interviewing her subjects offers a way to reconsider craft as the performance of a careful and relentlessly curious process of observation:

> . . . when I go into an artist's studio or dealers' backroom I bring a tape recorder, a notebook, and a camera, and I will be documenting the experience and the environment and my character with all three. . . . The tape recorder will be running, I'll take photographs of absolutely every corner from toe to head—with permission, as quickly as I possibly can, and then I'll write notes as well, about non-verbal behaviour, things I'm doubtful about at the time, the next question I want to ask . . .

Observation, in this expanded sense, is an essential skill worth learning as an emerging artist. A worrying percentage of art students arrive to my foundation classes with a decreased depth perception when it comes to the task of translating the world. The flatness of the JPEG has conditioned their vision in a way that usually translates into monolithic mark making. Digital technology has made images more easily available to artists, but this does not guarantee that we know what to do with them.

This matters, and not because everyone should be expected to be a painter or able to draw according to the standards of Fine Art. The material and immaterial possibilities are now much broader. This matters because that delicate process of translation from the eyes through the body, out towards the hand, and onto a surface can become the first stage in the journey to becoming aesthetically aware. Sight should not be overstated as a primary sense, but it operates as the most common metaphor in visual art, and should certainly stand as an option.

Craft, conceived as an open-ended and thoughtful *observation* of the world, matters because it allows the artist to spend time in the physical or mental presence of what they seek to translate for or perhaps exchange with a public. It is an encounter with a subject that allows for the layers of pleasure and pain to become sensible. If an aesthetic education is "that space that allows us to survive in the singular and the unverifiable," (Spivak 2012, 2) what the multiple lives of artists might have in common might be the enactment of a process that allows us to observe the world with the curiosity, criticality and passion necessary to devise our own craft.

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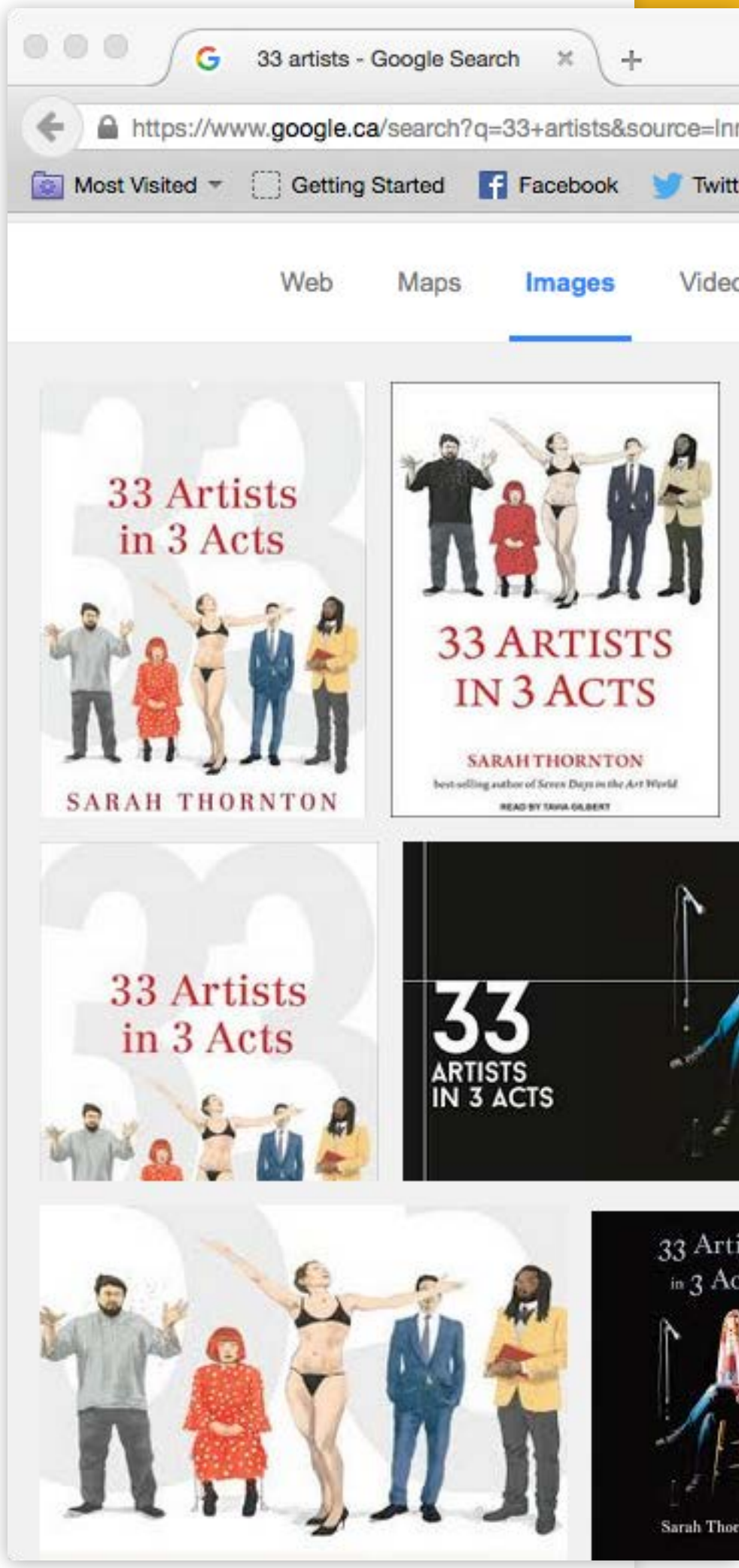
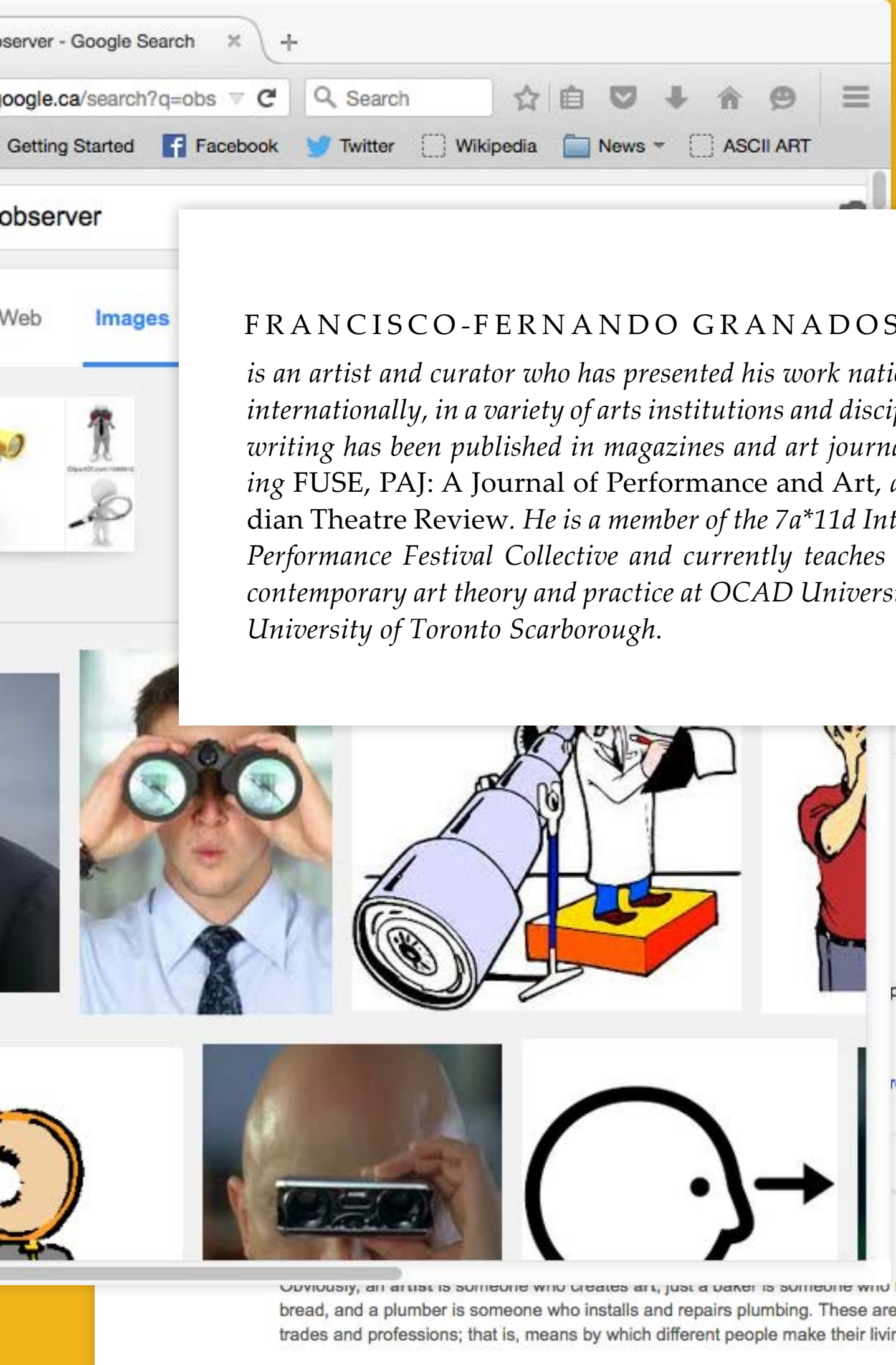


FRANCISCO-FERNANDO GRANADOS

is an artist and curator who has presented his work nationally and internationally, in a variety of arts institutions and disciplines. His writing has been published in magazines and art journals including FUSE, PAJ: A Journal of Performance and Art, *and* Canadian Theatre Review. *He is a member of the 7a*11d International Performance Festival Collective and currently teaches courses in contemporary art theory and practice at OCAD University and the University of Toronto Scarborough.*



Break it down:
Sighting/Citing/Siting Performance Art
Discussing Encomium with Brendan Fernandes

Brendan Fernandes in conversation with

Alison Cooley
Shauna Janssen
& Victoria Mohr-Blakeney

Moderated by Marianne Fenton and Jenn Snider

This roundtable discussion considers Brendan Fernandes' work *Encomium,* which was re-performed as the Keynote Performance for the 2015 Graduate CADN Conference and discussed the following day.

Jenn Snider: To begin, can you tell us about the history and development of the piece?

Brendan Fernandes: *Encomium* was actually one of the first pieces where I returned to dance. A little bit about my background: I practiced as a dancer, trained in ballet and modern techniques, and continued to dance in my undergraduate at York University. I stopped dancing due to injury—it was a turning point, my body couldn't... do it anymore. It stopped. And I think I had a breakup moment with dance after where I felt betrayed by it. Throughout my experience with dance I was always aware of my body, I took advantage of what my body could do in my youth, but it was also questioned and criticized: in ballet, my feet did not have the desired arch and my physical body wasn't the right size for a male ballet dancer. It was all of those things that made me leave ballet and lead me to modern; and then in modern, my body was accepted but actually couldn't take the technique and it became injured.

All performance documentation by Henry Chan

I didn't talk about dance for many years and this piece was the first, where I started to work with dance again. This was in 2010. *Encomium* came about from thinking about identities through subcultural experiences such as dance—looking at it through the ethnographic narrative of my cultural migration and movement.

Encomium is a piece that is based on Plato's symposium. Plato invites different speakers to talk about love and their idea of what love can be. The speech, the encomium that I reference, was written by Phaedrus. Phaedrus says in the symposium that love is asymmetrical; that in this relationship between a young male and his older male lover, the love is a teacher-mentorship relationship and although they come together, at some point the younger boy lover will mature and grow up and he will leave his lover. So love is always broken. And I started thinking about Phaedrus' love in terms of the relationship between these two bodies, but also between oneself and one's own body—almost like a mirroring. I've asked these two dancers to come together and make positions and to hold this embrace for as long as they can.

There are three encomiums that I've written using the sentiment of Phaedrus' speech; I use language, the language of Ballet, to call two bodies to come together. The performance is a durational piece when it is live. In ballet you always have to hold the position. Your body has to be perceived with a sense of form, the technique, and within that a sense of strength. A sense of weakness and vulnerability is never seen. When we watch dance we always see it from a distance; we are seeing it from an audience perspective, and you never see the body showing any vulnerability. My dancers are repeating the movement over and over, and the task that I'm giving them is simple in that they know how to make this movement—they're dancers, they understand it, they embody that sensibility. But in the duration of it, or the repetition... they will inevitably fatigue and fail.

Dance can become so romanticized; it looks so beautiful that we forget the dancers are actually enduring, there are physical pains and pleasures... But when you are actually

watching their bodies in a close proximity as seen in *Encomium*, we see them shake, we see the moments of stress. I wanted to play with that. That is *Encomium*. That is the basis of the piece.

Alison Cooley: There is also a line along the floor...

BF: Yes. Within *Encomium* I am questioning language. There is a trail, almost like a breadcrumb trail, of Morse code. I am interested in languages and obsolete languages—also the loss of language or the non-language of dance. Many ballets, for example, are lost because there is no way to record them. We now use the camera as a way to record and document dance. The floor trail piece translates to the words "love," "eros" and "desire," which are the words of the love relationship described in Phaedrus' speech. For Phaedrus, *eros* was about the most intense form of love; you would do anything for your lover, including killing yourself. So within that, there is this real sense of agency. Within the work, I am trying to give my dancers tasks to do, a place to find agency within the space.

I think that, for some dancers, they are always just told to do things. They are never given the space to actually ask, "what does this mean for our bodies?," so in this space, when they stop, when they break, when they hold onto each other and they move apart, they have been told to take as much time as they need to breathe into each other. To feel the difference. To feel what is going on in their body. And then, when they are ready, they can go back. It is interesting because that space of rest is actually the space where they then start to focus more on the pain and actually feel what is going on inside their bodies. I am curious about the space of stillness as a space of labour.

In a classical ballet company there is a pyramid structure. There is the corps de ballet, soloists, and principles. There is seemingly an allowance that the higher you are in this system, the more you are allowed to

move. I think of that in terms of the capitalist notion of being freer in being able to move, but still exerting in your space of freedom. I also question that mentality in regards to the audience and the ballet master or the director. That is why I am also on the periphery of these works, as I am playing the director role, but I am also trying to create this agency within the piece.

Victoria Mohr-Blakeney: It's interesting that you mention that, because what jumped out for me in last night's performance was this idea that the moments of relief we see on both their parts was either moving towards, or moving away. In the moments of stillness on either end, when they are watching each other and when they are coming together, we can see the arduous nature of the work they are doing and the physical impact of the concrete floor that they are working on and its effect on the spine and on embodied-ness. There is something really beautiful about seeing that rest in motion and witnessing that release between the wholes.

BF: It also makes me very anxious, because when you think about what dance is there is the idea that the body has to be in motion. I am playing with that. Being still is a liminal space. André Lepecki, a performance theorist, posited in his book *Exhausting Dance: Performance and the Politics of Movement* that dance doesn't exist without movement; when we have stoppages and ruptures in the process, dance doesn't exist. If we have to be in constant motion to be making a dance, that also then speaks to a question of labour. In the post-capitalist world we have to be doing to be productive. 'Still' means wasting time or being idle...

VMB: But, I think one moment of agency that's evident in the work, in terms of what you are talking about now—unlike the court ballet where they are not permitted to show… any evidence of exhaustion or fatigue—the work is allowing us to watch that fatigue through time and the exhaustion.

BF: And the proximity of your body to their body. You can smell them, you can hear them breathing, you can actually physically see their pain. When I bring the art world and the dance world together, weird things happen. Of course there is a history of collaboration between dance and art, but there still isn't the pure synergy that we want to have happen. I feel that I want it to happen more, but I also like weird things. When you bring bodies into a gallery space people act very differently. There is an etiquette to how we are supposed to present our bodies in a space. In a theatre we wouldn't just start talking. We have been conditioned to apply different etiquettes and I am really curious about that.

AC: One of the things that really struck me, and that I had a hard time getting away from, was the text. I am interested in the fact that the text is sort of a set of instructions for what is going to happen, and more broadly a descriptive text

about the relationship. But, there probably could have been a number of ways in which the performers worked within that text. Right? There could have been all kinds of permutations that actually didn't happen. I felt compelled to identify which one is the lover and which one is the beloved and to put them in an oppositional relationship, when in fact that is kind of ridiculous because the way that they were reacting in reference to each other was always subtly different.

Shauna Janssen: In **the video** the camera is drawing my eye to details that it would not necessarily be drawn to if I watched the live performance. So my engagement with the piece and my experience of witnessing it is very different. I guess I'm thinking about how the performance is in the gallery space and this idea of de-familiarizing that space and experience. What's so great about this work that you are doing is its invitation to engage in a different way and witness in a different way, even if you don't move as an audience member in that space. You were talking earlier about bringing your art and dance background together and we've been really focused on the bodies, which are not mutually exclusive from the space that they are moving in, so I'm just curious about the question of spatial agency.

BF: I work in these liminal spaces—these sort of undefined spaces. I want to talk about them as queer or different, not just open spaces. When I re-performed *The Working Move* at The Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam, it was suggested that we make the performance in a theatre. I said no, because then the formality would be understood: we will go to the theatre, we will sit there and we will watch it. I want to perform in the middle of the entrance where people buy tickets, where people are coming in and out of the museum. So, we built a dance floor and… the dancers sat on the periphery of this floor... and that created that moment of "what is happening here?" I think of my audience as also being performers in that space.

VMB: Your point about the importance of an embodied viewer and how that position shifts the dynamics of viewing is important in highlighting labour in your work. I think that if you had held the work that we witnessed last night in a proscenium theatre setting, you would completely lose this idea of embodied labour. To have everyone enjoying the reception, chatting, and watching these dancers struggling to hold their positions and sweating... that sort of thing happening in a leisurely atmosphere really creates a juxtaposition and challenges the act of viewing. We are

able to read further layers in the work, which are entirely dependent on context.

BF: Dance is the one field where we are given the allowance to look at a body. Where it is not seen as being inappropriate. Where you can just look at a body, and because of the physicality of the work they are "beautiful bodies." That is something else that I think: to see the bodies shake and struggle is part of the quivering space of being a beautiful and painful thing at the same time.

When I make my performances I am always working in these weird, peripheral spaces of what performance is. Rehearsal, or stretching—those are the things that we do to keep our bodies going, but they are also very private spaces. When you see it on the stage, it's the performance. So I am trying to play in those liminal spaces that are also private spaces. Like the rehearsal, for example—the space where it seems almost like a learning process.

One thing about *Encomium* is that I consider the **video** to be another piece. The live performance is one thing, and of course you are witnessing the duration, and again the physicality, as I said: the scent, the breath and all that is included through the confrontation with the physical. This **[video]** is edited. I purposely did things like change the frame rate, so that it just looks a little bit slower, a little bit richer. And, I've cut the story and I've made it through my personal lens so there is more of a romance or something that is happening... more of a narrative. I am following the body with pans, picking up on different things. So, the duration is lost but there is a different kind of narrative. It's a document, it tells what has happened, but it's a different story as well. I am curious about the camera and the story that the camera tells through dance.

VMB: One question that I have is in relation to the text that you had on the wall for the live performance. Having the element of that text there and then seeing the work was a temptation to see the movement as a physical embodiment and translation of the words. Whereas in reality, there is an impossibility of translating text in that linear way through dance. I mean, ideally it's a proposal that will inevitably collapse if you try to work with it that way and view this embodied practice and performance as an iteration of the text. Inevitably it cracks open to many more spaces.

BF: That's why I give you the opportunity to take a poster with the text on it—to perhaps make the performance yourself. It's a gesture. But

within the text is the language of *plié* and *demi-plié* (technical ballet terms). If you don't have that vernacular you can't even do the dance; it is already changed or lost in its becoming. That's what I was playing with in the poster—giving the instruction and saying, "yes, you can have it, but you can't have it." Or, if you do have it you are going to fail, because your body will strain and start to stop at some point.

SJ: One of the keywords that has come up a couple of times during the course of the conference is the word "queer."

BF: I think queer is a bit of a buzzword in academia right now. I also think that it is a very privileged term and that is not just the one thing, but the way that I use "queer" (and I also identify as being queer) is to mean being, again, on the periphery. For me, it's an open moniker for inclusivity—thinking about it as a form of social solidarity. Within that, queer is about blurring the edges and introducing intersections that can be considered complex or complicated. So, it is not necessarily trying to define, or trying to say that *Encomium* is one thing or the other. Queer is more of a kind of fusion or "to make more complicated." In the work, I'm bringing out those layers and that is how I see the work as having a queer edge.

SJ: Yes. Thinking about this idea of trace (Tracing Art's Edges) that has been circulating quite a bit in the conference, I think the queerness in this work, or the queer that emerges in this work, is related to the trace as the residue.

BF: And the trace being of the "original" or the "historical"? I think that queer is constantly in a space of flux and change, it could be one thing now but it could be something else tomorrow. The problem that I have with queer is that we all have our own definition of what queer is. So, how do we all talk about it as one thing when we all say that it can be anything? I would define the trace to be the historic context of what it has been and where it has come from. Queer was, as we know, a derogatory way to reflect on and respond to people. I think that's still the trace... but we are now empowering that trace and complicating it.

AUDIENCE QUESTIONS

Q: Do you think that writing should be more situated, the way Plato does it? Because even a formal, standard kind of theoretical writing, if that is more akin to the stage performance, can be rethought to create a different, situated writing in that knowledge is embedded in a situation. Writing actually takes on different meanings and relations if you do acknowledge that its situation is there. It is not a neutral, sterile frame.

VMB: I am very interested in that idea, and in the idea of language and its role, because on the one hand, as we have been discussing, site and context have the power to incite specific interpretative strategies on the part of the viewer, on the part of the embodied viewer—but so does language and how the work is written about. I find that, especially amongst artists working in performance, there is a vigilance around language and around how their work is contextualised. For example, the artist Tino Sehgal is very specific about how he wants his work spoken about because of the positional impact of language and its ability to incite these specific strategies. I am also interested in the residue of language around performance.

Yvonne Rainer was in Toronto this week, as was Sara Wookey—one of the official transmitters for Rainer's work *Trio A*—who was talking about Rainer's incredible memory, not only in terms of how she remembers every physical instance of that piece, but also every time she teaches it she teaches the same metaphors, verbally, for each moment in the piece. This is after, you know, 40, 50 years. The power of language and the relationships between language and performance are constantly going back and forth; I think, in a sense, *Encomium*'s text on the wall alludes to that. The invitation is in language; the initial proposal is in language.

Q: You are talking about the text as a particular kind of moment of information that does not necessarily intersect with the performance. I am wondering, can the text produce different kinds of spaces as well? Can the text and the performance be spaces themselves? The text itself can possibly be seen as a particular kind of space, and as a type of space that the curator or the choreographer could use. Language itself constituting space...

BF: For me, the text is a proposal for an imagined space. I think about it in terms of the Marxist Imaginary. It's a space of a political otherness that we can't even imagine, we don't even know what that could be. So, it's a proposal for a space, and that's why I say that within it there are obstacles, there are failures. But, it is a proposal for an imagined space, for me...

Q: A couple of comments about the floor, especially in regards to the line of Morse code on the floor: I was very aware of how it changed the space, knowing it was Morse code. The dancers are following that line and they are covering and uncovering it constantly. So whether I can read it or not, I was very aware of how they were moving, separating, and sometimes switching places, mirroring each other and always meeting midway on that line of code. That meeting was really crucial in terms of the sense of collaborative moment. Also, concentration and support (as mentioned before)—the sense of an empathetic moment...

BF: You could feel that line as a physical space... like a wall. That is perhaps why people felt that they couldn't cross over or walk over it, because the dancers' gaze was so connected that the line became something more.

There are also other issues that arise from this work. Menial labour can change our bodies and cause injuries. I think of it broadly within the context of labour in a post-capitalist world, and how bodies are valued or not valued. I also think about the "other" body, the body of colour. In my work I am totally referencing my personal dance narrative. I'm probably also referencing my own love lives, my own story of migration and movement.

As artists and as cultural workers we cannot deny the narrative of who we are. It will just come out. I think that I am threaded in there.

BRENDAN FERNANDES

is a Canadian artist of Kenyan and Indian descent. He completed the Independent Study Program of the Whitney Museum of American Art (2007) and earned his MFA (2005) from The University of Western Ontario and his BFA (2002) from York University in Canada. He has exhibited internationally and nationally including exhibitions at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, the Museum of Art and Design New York, Art in General, the Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal, The National Gallery of Canada, The Art Gallery of Hamilton, Brooklyn Museum, The Studio Museum in Harlem, Mass MoCA, The Andy Warhol Museum, the Art Gallery of York University, Deutsche Guggenheim, Bergen Kunsthall, Stedelijk Museum, Sculpture Centre, Manif d'Art: The Quebec City Biennial, The Third Guangzhou Triennial and the Western New York Biennial through The Albright-Knox Art Gallery. Fernandes has been awarded many highly regarded residencies around the world, including The Canada Council for the Arts International Residency in Trinidad and Tobago (2006), The Lower Manhattan Cultural Council's Work Space (2008), Swing Space (2009) and Process Space (2014) programs, and invitations to the Gyeonggi Creation Center at the Gyeonggi Museum of Modern Art, Korea (2009) and ZKM, Karlsruhe, Germany (2011). He was a finalist for the Sobey Art Award Canada's pre-eminent award for contemporary art. (2010), and was on the longlist for the 2013 and 2015 prize. A national Canadian tour of his work organized by the Kitchener-Waterloo Art Gallery continues to travel into 2016 and includes exhibitions at Rodman Hall, Brock University, The Varley Art Gallery, The Southern Alberta Art Gallery, Saint Mary's University—Art Gallery and a residency at The Contemporary Art Gallery—Vancouver. He is currently participating in *Disguises: Masks and Global African Art* organized by Seattle Art Museum in 2015 that will tour to the Fowler Museum of Cultural History, LA and the Brooklyn Museum, NY. He is a 2014 recipient of a Robert Rauschenberg Residency Fellowship and in 2016 he will be artist in residence at Northwestern University, Evanston, IL in the Department of Dance Studies.

CURATING DANCE

Writing Embodied Practice

VICTORIA MOHR-BLAKENEY

Over the last fifty years, dance has continued to shift out of traditional theatre venues into gallery, museum, and site-specific locations converging with modes of display most often associated with visual arts. As a result, a tradition of curatorial practice established in visual arts institutions intersected with the art form of dance, producing a new stream of curatorial practice now commonly referred to as dance curation.**[1]** Curatorial practice specific to the field of dance gave birth to new forms of publication, namely dance exhibition catalogues,**[2]** which arose first and foremost out of the intersection between these two modalities. Curatorial writing**[3]** in the context of the dance exhibition catalogue**[4]** provided an opportunity to situate dance within a broader art context.**[5]** This opportunity came with a responsibility to think critically about what it means to produce curatorial texts in/for the field of dance, which has its own distinct origins, histories, and scholarship.

At this moment in time, I believe it is critical to examine the function of curatorial writing in the context of dance, and identify the complex relationships between embodied practice**[6]** and textual discourse.

A Brief History of Dance Writing

From early choreographic manuals, to a lengthy history of dance notation, periodical reviews, and the emergence of dance scholarship as an independent field of study, the history of writing on the topic of dance long predates the convergence of dance and curatorial practice.**[7]** The field of dance has a long tradition of writing dating back to the first choreographic manuals produced in Europe in the 16th century, originally created by scholars to document court dances so that they could be learned, repeated, and disseminated (Lepecki 2004, 125). The choreographic manual gave rise to the first instances of dance notation, systems of codification by which movement was transcribed into a series of signs and symbols, to later be repeated and translated once again into motion (Lepecki 2004, 125). In Europe, in the early 1800s, these documents circulated widely, becoming cultural exports in the service of spreading both nationalism and influence, serving as an example of codified culture inscribed in language (Lepecki 2004, 127). Choreographic manuals were followed by periodical reviews and program notes, which accompanied audience members in performance venues across Europe and North America. The immaterial qualities of dance and attempts to categorize, theorize, and codify it continue to intrigue and engage dance scholars, who have written extensively about dance writing in both historical and contemporary contexts.

Dance & Writing: Theoretical Concerns

Dance scholars have long debated what has been perceived to be an inherent tension between the moving body and attempts to capture embodied practice in written language. The history of dance writing has been labeled by some scholars as an attempt to codify and document embodied performance, dating back to the Enlightenment's impulse to categorize all forms of human knowledge.**[8]** There is a large existing body of contemporary scholarship that addresses the complexities of writing about dance, including prominent dance scholars and performance theorists**[9]** who argue that due to dance's embodied nature, interpretation via language is problematic. Scholars such as André Lepecki, for example, have pointed to intrinsic differences in medium (between body and text), as the source of the problem. In his article, "Inscribing Dance", Lepecki addresses this issue directly when he asserts: "…dance's materiality as resistance to linguistic grasping: the moment dance is arrested, fixated, written down, it is no longer dance"

(Lepecki 2004, 139). The moment dance is written about, Lepecki argues, there is a shift in materiality from movement to writing which "withdraws dance from the flow of its own materiality" (Lepecki 2004, 133). The complications inherent in this translation have often led scholars to a discussion about how each medium (writing and dance) is valued in the field of representation; Lepecki argues that writing is sometimes seen as an attempt to supplement or rectify dance's status.**[10]**

Arguments that dance and writing are valued differently in the field of representation also emerge from performance theory. In her book *The Archive and the Repertoire*, performance theorist Diana Taylor writes about the relationship between text and embodied practice, asserting that writing can often be seen as standing against ephemerality and embodiment.**[11]** Taylor's text points to a hierarchy within systems of representation, and asserts that writing has become legitimized over other epistemic systems, such as embodied performance (Taylor 2003, 16). She relates this hierarchy to systems of power and control established through history, positing: "the space of written culture then, as now, seemed easier to control than embodied culture" (Taylor 2003, 17). While Taylor writes specifically about language as a tool in the colonization of indigenous embodied expression, she underscores the point that embodied performance, among other forms of expression has, in many ways, not been considered as a credible source of knowledge (Taylor 2003, 17). If we concur with Taylor's position that writing is perceived to hold credibility, legitimacy, and power over embodied expression, then it is essential to carefully consider the implications of translating or interpreting dance into writing.

Dance, Writing & Political Agency

Contemporary dance scholars have argued that dance's resistance to language is linked to the body's agency in the field of representation. A question, which dance scholars have addressed, is whether or not translating dance from its original material form—the body—into writing has the potential to strip dance of its embodied agency. Dance scholars Randy Martin and André Lepecki agree that embodied performance holds political power. Lepecki claims that, in dance, there is the "potential for the dancing body to transcend a narrowing aestheticization of its moving figure, and thus claim status as political agent" (Lepecki 2004, 4). Lepecki, among other dance scholars, has argued that it is not so much dance itself but the presence of dance that holds this power (Lepecki 2004, 137). He describes

presence in dance as “slippery movement . . . that which will not be pinned down” (Lepecki 2004, 137). The question remains whether or not dance’s political agency is subordinated by writing. Post-structural theorist Jacques Derrida asserts that only when dance evades documentation and written language, can it be seen as a site of agency in the field of representation. **[12]** I disagree with Derrida’s assertion, and would counter that many of seminal radical and subversive dance performances throughout history have been documented and yet have simultaneously held political agency and deeply impacted the field.**[13]** I do agree with Lepecki, however, that dance’s ability to create a disturbance in the field of representation serves as one of its most potentially subversive qualities.

The Rise of Curatorial Writing

By the mid 20th century, the visual arts exhibition catalogue had evolved from a document of itemized artworks for potential sale to an important vehicle for the production of critical discourse, aimed to address the conceptual and intellectual goals of art and contextualize individual contemporary artists and artworks within the greater field**[14]** of the visual arts landscape (O’Neil 2012, 18). With the rise of conceptual, body-based, and post-object art in the 1960’s (the dematerialization of art in Europe and North America) the need for theoretical framing discourses produced by critics and curators began to grow.**[15]** While curatorial practice had to respond to shifting practical and conceptual trends in the field of art, curatorial writing evolved to respond to these changes.**[16]** The rise of dematerialized art practices coincided with an increase in the production of curatorial writing to contextualize and accompany these practices. The rise of textual discourse to accompany artworks can also be attributed, in part, to the rise of the independent curator,**[17]** which arguably produced a shift in the purpose and value of curatorial writing. Tracing a brief history of curatorial writing in the field of curatorial practice is an important frame for the analysis to follow, arguing the function of curatorial writing in the field of dance.

Dance, Writing & The Archive

The relationship between writing and dance cannot be properly evaluated without addressing the relationship between dance and the act of documenting it. Derrida’s notion of the archive,**[18]** as outlined in his seminal

text *Archive Fever*, offers key insights into understanding the archival mechanism at play in the relationship between dance and text.**[19]** In *Archive Fever*, Derrida categorizes a series of characteristics and terms essential to understanding the complex function of the archive, including: the archival impulse, archive fever, and the death drive. According to Derrida, the archival drive comes from a desire to return to the origin, to a point of "absolute commencement" (Derrida 1996, 2). If we situate Derrida's theory of the archive in the context of writing and embodied practice, documenting and interpreting dance through writing can be seen as an ongoing iteration of the archival impulse, a never-ending attempt to return to a state of presence. In *Archive Fever*, Derrida outlines the archival impulse as that which always works in tandem with what he calls the archviolithic drive or death drive, a force that "works to destroy the archive, on the condition of effacing, but with a view to effacing its own traces" (Derrida 1996, 10). Viewed through this lens, the ephemeral nature of dance, "[its] somewhat embarrassing predicament of always losing itself as it performs itself" (Lepecki 2004, 125), can be understood as an iteration of Derrida's death drive. The documentation and text-based analysis of dance can thus be read as the archival impulse and death drive perpetually at play (Lepecki 2004, 129).

In *Archive Fever*, Derrida points to the ability of textual documentation to co-determine that which it archives (Derrida 1996, 11). This assertion is important to all those participating in the documentation of dance in any form. By examining curatorial writing in the field of dance via Derrida's theory of the archive, dance writing can be seen as simultaneously co-determining the performance it seeks to document. In other words, dance curators co-determine the embodied practices about which they write. In the relationship between embodied practice and documentation through language, the archive has the single, clear advantage of longevity, as Taylor points out: "Insofar as it constitutes materials that seem to endure, the archive exceeds the live" (Taylor 2003, 19). The dance catalogue can thus be understood to function as an archival mechanism that will not only outlive, but has the potential to co-determine embodied practice by standing in as its legacy.

The Dance Catalogue: New Possibilities

While scholars have written extensively about the problems with writing about dance, in the contexts of both contemporary dance scholarship and performance theory, few scholars have examined how curatorial writing

functions in the context of dance. If we view curatorial writing on dance as an attempt to "legitimize" dance into a more "credible" form of knowledge,**[20]** then this holds considerable implications for dance curators. When producing curatorial writing in the field of dance, dance curators have a responsibility to remain cognizant of the hierarchies operating fields of representation, with respect to writing and embodied practice. Similarly, if we take Lepecki and Derrida's views that dance's political agency is intrinsically tied to its materiality, and subdued by its translation into writing, dance curators have a responsibility to investigate possibilities for writing that uphold the agency of embodied performance. Understanding the particular function of curatorial writing in the field of dance offers an opportunity for curators who use the form of the dance catalogue to reconsider the function of writing in the field of dance.

If, as Derrida posits, the archive holds the power to co-determine its content, dance curators must consider the enormity of the responsibility they bear when producing textual discourse in relationship to embodied practice; specifically, possibilities for destabilizing**[21]** the dynamics of the archival impulse should be considered. Several contemporary dance scholars have considered alternative approaches to writing in the context of dance, including Lepecki, who describes what he calls the possibility of writing *along* ephemerality**[22]** as opposed to *against* it, an idea originally introduced by theorists Mark Franko and Peggy Phelan (Lepecki 2004, 132). Though documentation may be seen as standing against the agency of embodied practice,**[23]** the question remains: what would an alternative approach to curatorial writing, in the form of the dance exhibition catalogue look like? Is there a possibility for writing in the context of dance that supports, rather than subdues, embodied practice?

In this paper I have sought to identify key mechanisms at work in the interaction between writing, dance, and the archive—proposing that, although the relationships between writing, dance, and the archive may be intrinsic to these forms, when conscious of these concerns, the catalogue offers a productive space in which to influence, manipulate, and subvert how dance and writing interact. This level of intervention may be achieved by creating gaps, fissures, and instability in the text, destabilizing its narrative, and using writing to gesture towards embodied practice as a critical source of knowledge. Conscientious approaches to dance catalogue production provide an opportunity for readers and viewers to create complex, non-linear narratives and interpretative experiences to draw connections across media, thus allowing for practical and theoretical expansion in both the fields of contemporary dance and curatorial practice.

NOTES

[1] For the purposes of this essay dance curation, or curating dance, refers to instances in which standard curatorial methodologies, practice, and approaches are applied to the art form of dance.

[2] Based on my research, I have determined the typology of the dance catalogue to include three major categories. First, dance exhibition catalogues, which include critical or interpretive writings and are produced in conjunction with live performances or events. Second, dance retrospective catalogues, which examine the history of a single artist's career or dance movement. Third, dance process catalogues, which document a creative process or project, performance think tank, workshop etc. Here, I will be focusing on the former: dance exhibition catalogues. Unless otherwise indicated, the term "dance catalogue" is used in this text to refer to the dance exhibition catalogue.

[3] I use the term curatorial writing to describe the professional writing practices of curators and writers, aimed at contextualizing artworks. Early curatorial writing in the field of dance occurred primarily in the form of the dance exhibition catalogue.

[4] The first dance exhibition catalogue published in Toronto was titled *Dance and Film*. It was published in Toronto by the Art Gallery of Ontario in 1977, and edited by dance scholar and critic Selma Odom.

[5] It must be considered whether or not it is of benefit to the field(s) of dance, for dance artists, and the form of dance itself to be contextualized within the greater field of art, a field dominated by scholars and historians from the visual arts. Due to the limited scope of this research, this essay does not address the theoretical effects of contextualizing dance within a larger (namely visual) arts canon.

[6] The term 'embodied practice' is used by a number of prominent dance scholars and performance theorists such as Diana Taylor, whose writing serves as an important cornerstone in the theoretical foundations of this essay. I have chosen the term 'embodied practice' to refer to live performance throughout this text, as opposed to other common terms such as 'ephemerality' (or in some cases simply 'dance') to refer to the importance of physicality and embodied knowledge in dance performance, and also to include cross disciplinary performance practices emerging from the field of contemporary dance.

[7] The relationship between text and movement, and the history of dance writing, predates the intersection between dance and curatorial texts by over five centuries.

[8] In the introduction to *Of the Presence of the Body* André Lepecki also classified choreography as a form of non-textual codification and inscription.

[9] Some of these scholars include: Susan Leigh Foster, André Lepecki, and Peggy Phelan.

[10] In *Of the Presence of the Body*, Mark Franko disputes the perception that ephemerality is in constant need of documentation (Lepecki 2004, 130).

[11] Taylor is writing in the context of a primarily Latin American anti-oppressive framework rather than in the context of contemporary dance scholarship, but her words resonate nonetheless. In *The Archive and the Repertoire*, Taylor applies a post-colonial lens to the role of writing in Europe's conquest of the Americas, and examines how embodied practices by subjugated groups were repressed (Taylor 2003, 16).

[12] In *Of the Presence of the Body*, Lepecki outlines Derrida's position on dance, highlighting one of the few moments the theorist wrote directly about the field(s) of dance.

[13] An example of this phenomenon can be seen in Yvonne Rainer's *Trio A*, which served as a key moment in the post-modern paradigm shift in dance but was also thoroughly documented. This being said, it can be argued that Rainer's original performance was not documented, but rather a subsequent performance, years later.

[14] O'Neil attributes the emergence of what he describes as *contemporary* curatorial discourse to the late 1980s, when curatorship evolved into an independent field of discourse.

[15] As O'Neil states, the role of the curator has evolved from the caretaker of a collection, stemming from the Latin 'curar' to care for, to the role of a cultural producer and facilitator of knowledge and discourse (O'Neil 2012, 9).

[16] O'Neil sums up the interconnectedness of curatorial practice and discourse stating that they are didactically intertwined as a result of inscribing and recoding curatorial practice in textual form.

[17] O'Neil attributes the rise of the independent curator as occurring primarily in the 1990s.

[18] In *Archive Fever*, Derrida describes the archive as "objectivizable storage", and claims it is a reproducible iteration linked to the production of memory.

[19] Although Derrida writes in the context of live experience and the archive, the complex mechanisms he identifies in relationship to archival function can be applied to the relationship between dance (embodied ephemeral practice) and written language (documentation).

[20] In her text, *The Archive and the Repertoire*, Diana Taylor uses these terms when she compares how embodied practice is considered as a site of knowledge versus writing.

[21] Lepecki writes about the unfixed nature of dance, going on to add that audiences and writers can also be thought of as being fluid and in motion. Perhaps this multi-destabilization of signification characteristic of both dance and writing holds the power to destabilize the relationship between text and movement, giving way to new possibilities the re-configuring this relationship (Lepecki 2004, 134).

[22] Lepecki stresses that writing in this way occurs by emphasizing the erasure at the origin of dance discourse but gives no concrete examples of writing along ephemerality, leaving the reader to speculate and draw his or her own conclusions.

[23] Lepecki goes on to cite Franko's argument that documentation has been used in the service of canonization.

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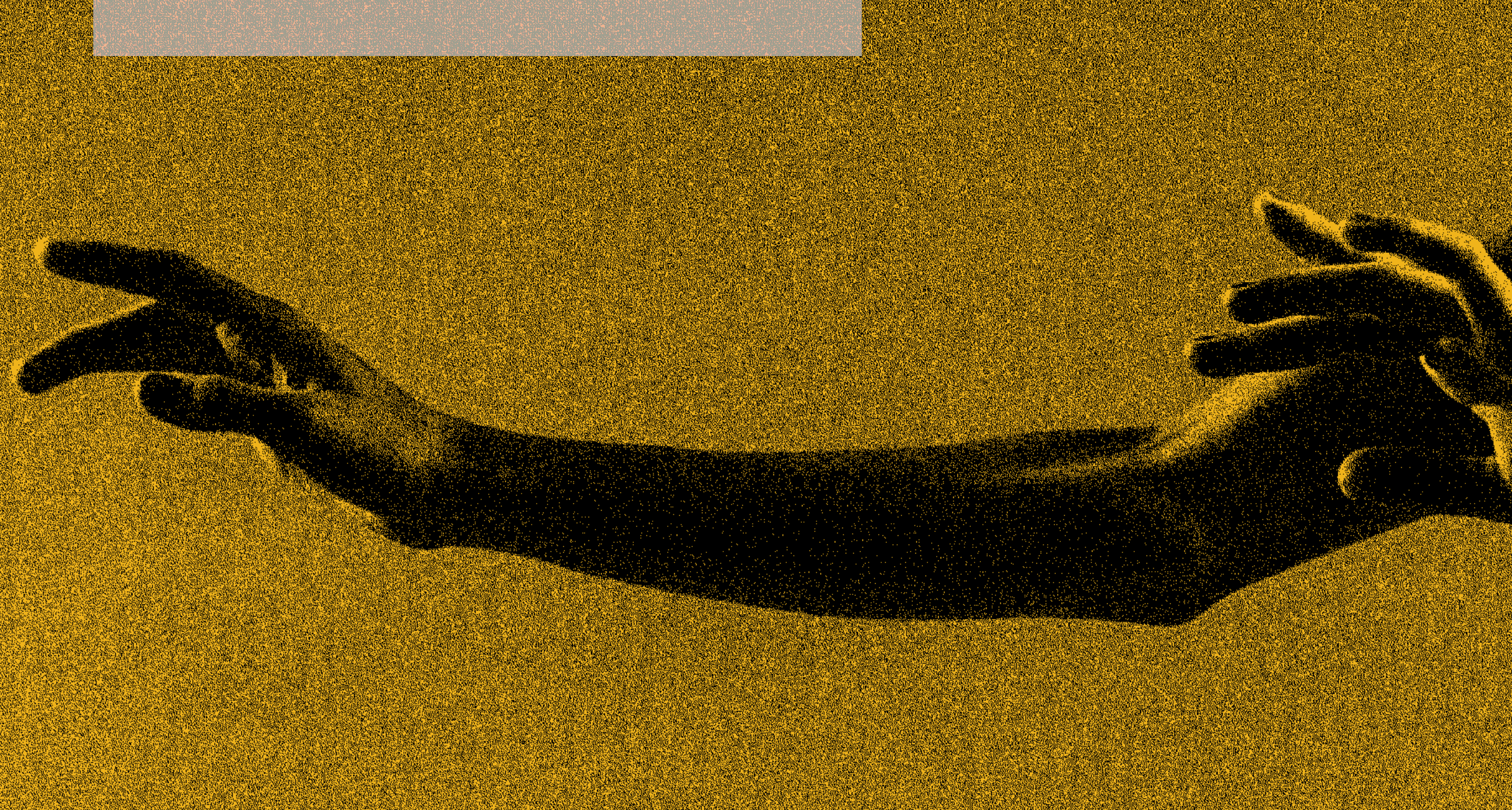
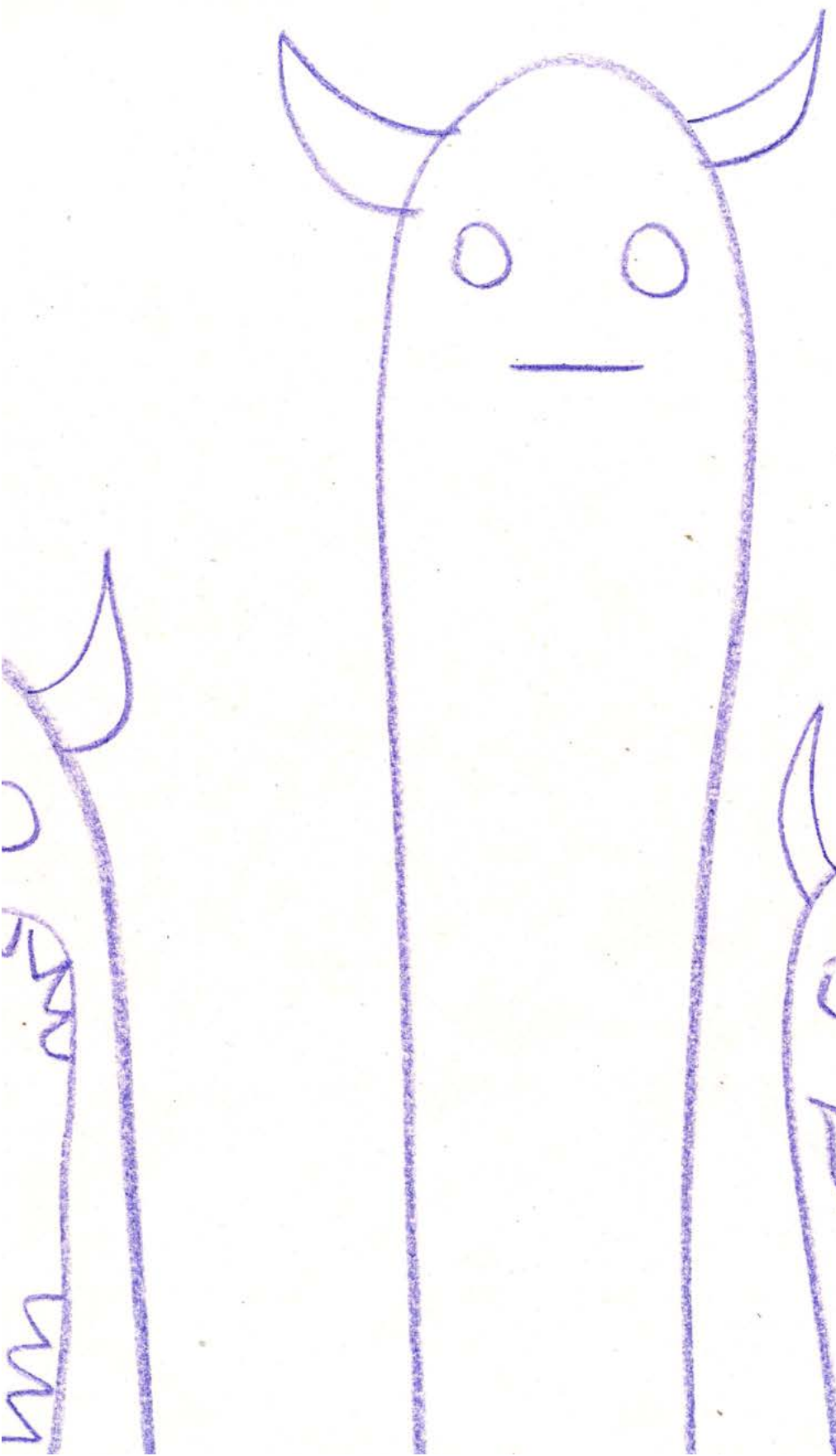
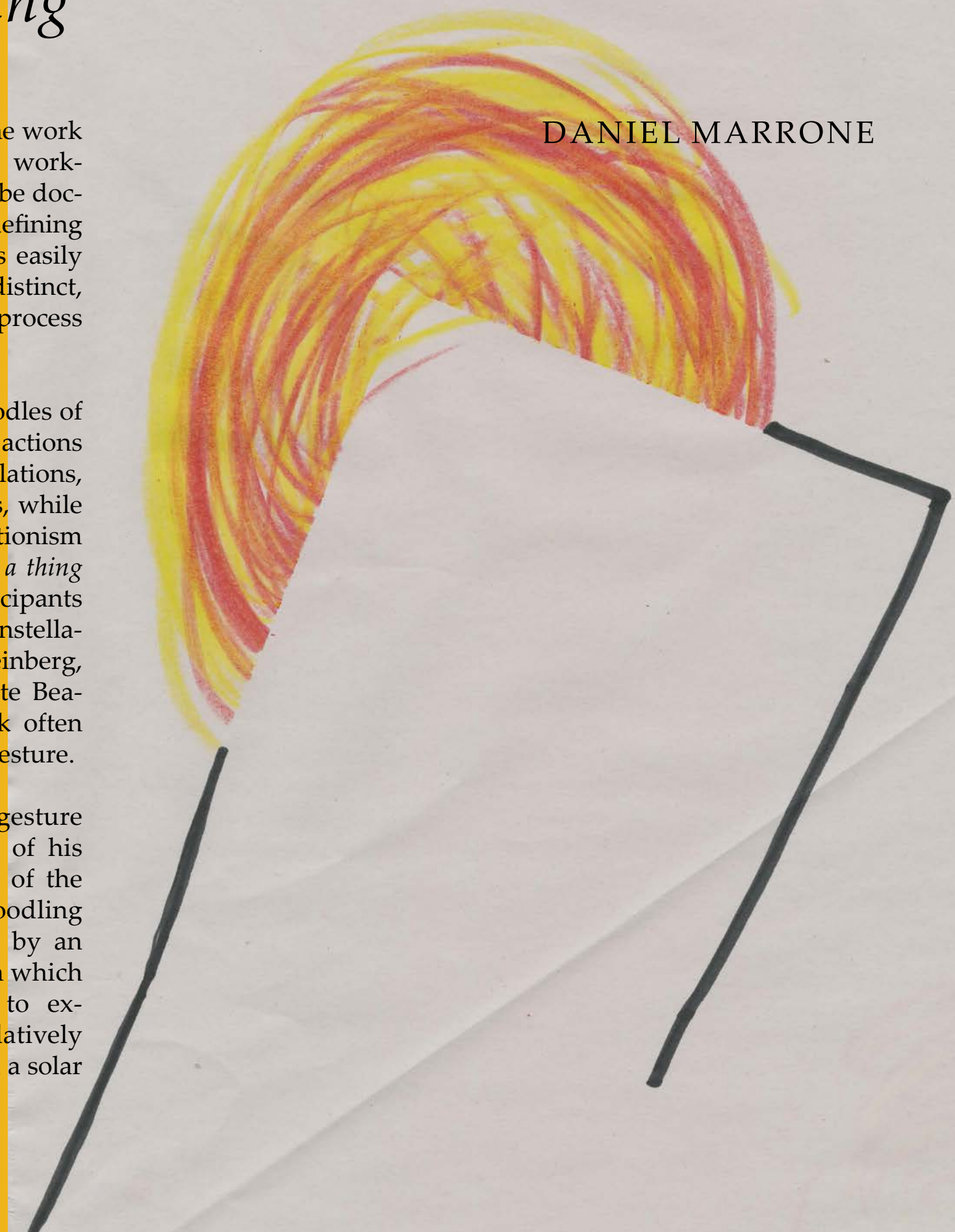




Doodling in the Margins:

Reflecting on Process, Idle Gestures, and Mark-making

DANIEL MARRONE



Perhaps it's fitting that most of the work produced during the doodling workshop was mislaid before it could be documented—after all, one of the defining features of the doodle is that it's easily overlooked. Ordinary and indistinct, doodling is a marginal act, more process than product.

A range of exercises solicited doodles of everyday objects, dream images, actions and movements, conceptual correlations, apples, birds, and future projects, while attempting to forestall perfectionism with questions like: *Is there such a thing as a 'bad' doodle?* Workshop participants also encountered an unlikely constellation of artists – Hokusai, Saul Steinberg, Cy Twombly, Trisha Brown, Kate Beaton, among others—whose work often provides a trace of restless, idle gesture.

Marcin Kedzior engages in a gesture that traces the actual materials of his process, offering a clever index of the rectangular margin in which doodling so often takes place. Prompted by an exercise titled "Big Doodles"—in which participants were encouraged to experiment with scale—this relatively large marking-out brings to mind a solar

eclipse, playing with absence and presence. Is it too calculated to be considered a doodle? Almost an inverted doodle, it both negates and re-centres a concentric cluster of peripheral marks.

Sarah Pinder's response to the same exercise has an entirely different tone and texture: a row of almost spectral monsters that embody the spontaneity and economical linearity characteristic of the most effortless doodling. A few deft strokes are enough to render an assortment of surprisingly animate and engaging creatures, by turns friendly and impassive, alarmed and alarming. Distinguished by horns and teeth, these streamlined monsters come in various shapes, sizes, and tempers but share a definite family resemblance—loose and light, but still solid.

Admittedly, these big doodles lose some of their impact (and surface area) when cropped by a scanner and scaled down; more compact, peripheral doodles might fare better. Fundamentally unfixed and unfinished, doodling draws much of its potency from its marginal position, and may in fact harden into something else entirely when it is pulled into the centre of the canvas. The hallmark of the doodle is a lack of cultivation, which affords it a kind of naive interdisciplinarity. A product of involuntary energy, it does not require any training, and rarely aspires to art, but frequently serves part of an artist's process. Ultimately, the doodle is an instance of mark-making at its most elemental.

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Exploring the Edges of Doodles:
Participant Response

BRITTANY HIGGENS & MELANIE SCHNIDRIG

The hallmark of the doodle is its lack of cultivation, its status as an index of idle gesture and involuntary energy. Easily overlooked, it turns up wherever more deliberate marks are made, often finding its home in marginal spaces. It is tempting to classify it as a cousin to the sketch, or a kind of precursor to the cartoon, but the doodle resists comparison to other forms of visual culture, always at the periphery of art, craft and writing.

Though it does not require any training, and rarely aspires to art, it is frequently part of an artist's process. Not quite drawing, not sketching, not writing, not even scribbling, doodling is an unfixed phenomenon all its own, a process that exists at (and marks out) the boundaries of artistic practice.

The doodle tends toward linearity and transparency, less suited to volume and depth. Doodling is a protean act, the results of which tend to frustrate traditional methods of semiotic or art-historical analysis. It can be iconic, indexical, symbolic, purely expressive, or some indefinable combination of modes —ultimately, the doodle is an instance of mark-making at its most elemental.

—Daniel Marrone
"Doodling in the Margins" workshop description

Daniel Marrone's workshop, "Doodling through the Margins," guided participants through activities designed to de-marginalize the doodle and emphasize its presence within academic and contemporary art spheres. Using instructive examples, Marrone's discussion prompted a series of doodling exercises for participants to take part in, including: "Bad Doodles," "Icon, Index, Symbol," "A Quick Lesson in Simplified Doodling," "Inspired by Steinberg," "Doodles toward a Future Project," and "Big Doodles." These exercises allowed participants to envision and reflect on historic examples of doodles, doodles as a brainstorming tool, and the defining qualities of a doodle aesthetic. Following each activity, participants shared their doodles with the group, which led to further discussion. Here, we've focused on two of the exercises: "Bad Doodles" and "A Quick Lesson in Simplified Doodling."

"Bad Doodles"

Marrone began the workshop by presenting the group with the question: "Is there such a thing as a bad doodle?" This raised ideas surrounding the interdisciplinary characteristics and ambiguous quality of the doodle as a medium or technique. Ultimately, Marrone argued that there's no point in determining whether a doodle is good or bad because it's an inherently unrefined gesture, sitting "always at the periphery of art, craft and writing." Therefore, the doodle lies in an in-between space that resists the definitive aesthetic parameters of traditional mediums such as drawing, sketching, and illustration.

"A Quick Lesson in Simplified Doodling"

Marrone built on the discussion of "bad doodles" during an exercise on "simplified doodling," in which he sought to identify the "edges" of the doodle as an aesthetic concept. He suggested that doodles are not "concerned with volume or depth"; they are born from spontaneity and, although the notion of the "bad doodle" may be irrelevant, the doodle can easily develop into the more formal technique of sketching—especially if the doodler takes his or her task too seriously. As a timed group activity, this "Quick Lesson" required that we doodle something we encountered on a daily basis. Brittany drew a simplified outline of a large, steamy coffee with Tim Hortons handwritten across the middle of the cup. Another participant drew their dog, and someone else drew a bicycle. Because the exercise was conducted in a limited time frame and we had previously discussed the impossibility of an unacceptable or bad doodle, participants were relaxed about rapidly producing their work, underscoring the informality and spontaneity that Marrone's presentation encouraged.

By completing the workshop's exercises we found that Marrone created a safe and engaging space for us as participants to flex our creative muscle. Overall, Marrone's emphasis on reimagining the value of a doodle illustrated that this value stems from the doodler's creativity, and doodling has been and can be practiced by anyone. Marrone's challenge stemmed from encountering the idea that the production of relevant or meaningful creative material is an act performed exclusively by artists. As a result, during group discussions we found that the doodles not only encouraged creativity, but also allowed Marrone to take on a dynamic and informal approach to the traditional workshop model. This tied in especially well with our conference theme of reassessing the ways in which we think about, talk about, and access artistic practices that play with notions of how borders and boundaries influence meaning in the contemporary art context.

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THE MOBILE CRITICAL MARATHON

Alison Cooley

In March 2014, I began to host and produce a podcast about art in Canada entitled ***What it Looks Like***. As a young critic and curator, I was (and continue to be) curious about how to use documentary radio to tell stories about art that defy the standard interview format and instead offer the narrative drive, accessibility, and curiosity I saw so plainly in popular science podcasts. Storytelling prevails in my podcast: I collected a great story about an accidental encounter with Shawna Dempsey and Lori Millan's *Lesbian National Parks and Services* for my first episode, solicited dispatches from across the country about regionalism, and explored the market-pull of Inuit art by trying to untangle its primacy in Google AdWords (learning that the search term "Inuit Art" is so valuable that people whose websites don't have anything to do with the subject buy up ads about it to drive hits, even as Inuit artists in the North may see minimal profits from a Southern internet frenzy over it).

Soon, though, I began to examine the potential for alternative story-telling formats that have not been available to me as a critic in other venues. Audio offers a unique opportunity to both document an experience firsthand and narrate from outside of it—a part of what I loved about the science podcasts I was attempting to follow. Straying from documentary-making, I decided to set up a performative art critical experiment, the *Mobile Critical Marathon*,

which took place on January 7, 2015. I put out a call for press releases, promising to review each show I was asked to see:

On January 7th, I'll be visiting every gallery in Toronto that sends me a press release for an exhibition running that day. I will produce a short audio review of every show I see during the Mobile Critical Marathon*, which will be released as a podcast later that month.*

The Mobile Critical Marathon *is an experiment in seeing everything in a busy city, sketching Toronto's artistic ecology in a single day, and charting a relationship between the critic (and her movement) and gallery press. I have never honestly tried to make it to every exhibition I hear about. The* Mobile Critical Marathon *makes doing so a weird, hyper-productive, performative act.*

On January 7, with a flu-in-recovery and a list of nine galleries to visit, I began to record and livestream my immediate interactions with the exhibitions I encountered. This paper does not re-hash the audio reviews I published, nor does it take a scholarly look at the lineage of the kind of performative criticism I embarked on. Rather, it asks, "What is the value of performative criticism?" and it charts the revelatory potential of my own experiment, exposing dimensions of disciplinary vulnerability I felt throughout the project.

Inspired by the rogue potential of experiments like Lori Waxman's ***60 wrd/minute art critic***, and of others exemplifying a less-than-serious treatment of artwork and our operating methods as arts workers (Yelp reviews of art galleries, for example, or Helen Read's two books of fan fiction about art and artists), I set out with grand aspirations to productively undermine the structure of my own work, thereby exposing its essential faults.

I quickly fell, habitually, into the kind of formalist/iconographic analysis often taught at art school, which has its lineage in theorists like Heinrich

Wölflinn and Erwin Panofsky and follows a set of legible steps:

1. Describe the work in purely formal and factual terms
2. Make some suggestions about what the forms, images, and symbols in the work mean and why the artist has knowingly used them
3. Wrap it up in a broader context
4. (optional) Make a judgement about whether the art is good**[1]**

As I encountered a set of works in Arsenal's young artist exhibition, *NEXT*, I found myself describing the quality of colours and textures. Many of the works in the exhibition relied on a kind of trompe l'oeuil effect: one painting that appeared to be made of Borduas-esque swaths of impasto black and white paint was revealed to be a textile stitched together in patches; other paintings imitated the pixilation of digital imagery; and a lumpy, donut-shaped wall piece I initially mistook for insulation foam was revealed as a ceramic work by the crumpled, clay heap that accompanied it on the floor. My initial, formalist approach to the artwork was already cumbersome at the encounter of this first exhibition. I could spend only half an hour, maximum, at each gallery to ensure I would see everything. I was conspicuously aware of the dull listening experience that is me describing art. Still, I performed what I sensed was an essential task: if I were to eschew the first descriptive level of analysis, I would have nothing to hang an interpretation on. Interpreting without first describing is not fair to artists.

In this sense, criticism's disciplinarity is not fuzzy: part of the critic's job is to describe her encounter with the work. Although the mechanisms for doing this are undoubtedly entrenched in the Western art historical and art critical tradition I hoped to undermine in my experiment, they are both necessary and useful. I cling to them not as a matter of disciplinary protocol, but also as a matter of ethics.

Responding with this critical toolkit to Tiziana La Melia's exhibition at Mercer Union, ***The Eyelash and the Monochrome***, was a performance of my being confused by work, an effect of the interpretive act. My response was also one of frustration—an embodied understanding that confusion bars viewers from artist-run culture. An outdoor billboard project by ***Giles Round*** emblazoned with "Sorry!" seemed a poetic response to the works inside—a "sorrynotsorry" for art's obfuscations. La Melia's exhibition was intentionally opaque. In fact, that's what my colleague, Rosie Prata, described as the show's strength:

> Like a tapping cursor, [La Melia] prods the viewer into trying to wrench sense and significance out of the ciphers she presents. The big reveal is that, as in life, there is no one answer as to what something means. Ambiguity prevails, but along with it comes wonderment. Like a cursor, like a batting eyelash, La Melia is winking at us (Prata 2015).

As a performative critic, I didn't always get the sense La Melia was winking at me; instead, I felt anxious to "get it right" as I recorded, butting up against a show that couldn't be gotten right. I imagine this experience is not unique to me or to being recorded— merely being in the gallery as a viewer has its own social performative dimensions, and understanding art has a significant social capital.

La Melia's exhibition also opened up a space between speaking and writing that reoccurred throughout the rest of the experiment. In conversation, I routinely resort to all of the speech habits deemed unprofessional and immature in young women: upspeak, vocal fry, and failure to finish sentences declaratively (hedging instead with "umm," or "yeah, so"). In writing, I intentionally mask these characteristics, and when I encounter difficult exhibitions I look for poetic solutions to my indecisiveness.

Though I strive to write crisply, I occasionally choose to let some salient point dangle—let a subtle suggestion linger in some intentionally imprecise phrasing. Later in the day, I tried to accomplish this in an analysis of Xiaojing Yan's ***Cloud Cell***, saying "it's beautiful and I'll leave it at that." I would like that phrase to sound perfectly equivocal—to suggest that it is pleasurable but perhaps not *significant* that the work is beautiful— but instead, listening back, I'm aware that the statement sounds like an endorsement. Inside criticism as a profession, we have the option of practicing criticism by omission: simply not writing about shows we don't consider up to snuff. I had no recourse to this during the *Mobile Critical Marathon*.

By about mid-day, I was noticeably wary of my own gendered propensity to smile more and speak in high tones when I encountered gallery assistants and other humans. This unintentional gender performance does me no favours.

I found that the presence of other people in the gallery inhibited me; in most cases, the people who had invited me to the gallery were not present. Inside ***Loop***, where I was underwhelmed by the work on display, I was tentative and quiet in an attempt to be sensitive to the gallery attendant, who did not know I was coming. In the case of ***8-11***, the gallery had stayed open an extra day for my experiment, and I was able to participate in the collective members' gal-

lery-sitting that day. Our discussion became an exchange not just about the show, but about Toronto's art scene and its friendliness to criticism. Though that personal conversation was private and I failed to include it in my final podcast, it strongly tinged my interaction with the show.

The personal is not often a tension or conflict I experience with any immediacy as a critic. As an emerging critic, I admit I have a significant sense of anxiety about how my work will be perceived (especially by its subjects, the artists), but I rarely have to account for the affective impact of my criticism in real time. Though I strive for a certain amount of critical distance in my writing (I often politely decline artists who would like to tell me about their work after I've seen it, or suggest they might help me write), this project, in some of its more enclosed moments, became a critical closeness.

Moving on to the Suzy Lake retrospective at the AGO, I circled back to a dilemma I'd faced earlier in the day at Artscape Youngplace, in front of work by Alison S.M. Kobayashi, and also while visiting Mercer Union: video work takes time, and time was at a premium for me. I had rushed past Kobayashi's video work and Liz Rhodes' video at Mercer. In front of Lake's video *The Natural Way to Draw*, I noticed myself repeating the pattern I'd traced at these earlier spaces, using contextual clues within the space to understand the video.

It was not until my trek to Scarborough that I found myself sitting with a video in the Doris McCarthy Gallery—Elizabeth Price's *THE WOOLWORTHS CHOIR OF 1979* (2012), a video whose narrative demanded my stillness, and captured my unyielding attention. I watched, riveted by the litany of finger snaps and an instructional walk-through of the traditional layout of architectural church choirs.

We live in a time where viewers are proselytized to slow looking, reactionary, perhaps, to our distractible internet pleasure-seeking viewing. "Slow Art Day" is a yearly event [2]; common-sense, guilt-trip consensus seems to be that it should take a long time to look at art. Art historian James Elkins extols the virtues of long-time looking at art, "not just glancing but looking, staring, gazing, sitting or standing transfixed: forgetting, temporarily, the errands you have to run, or the meeting you're late for, and thinking, living, only inside the work" (Elkins 2010).

Meanwhile, Guardian critic Jonathan Jones suggests that "… the wonder of art is deeply connected with how it can un-anchor you from time. Instead of rushing to the next deadline or message, you can forget … for a moment,

and linger in the other-time, created by art." Unlike Elkins, his argument isn't one for long-looking. Instead, he concludes, video work not set on a kind of exploratory loop—that is, video art with narrative, created with a specific start and end point—is not art. It doesn't belong in a gallery, because it expects that a certain amount of time be spent with it, and art should never do that (Jones 2015).

This common consensus towards slowness (even apparent in Jones' dismissiveness of having to spend any certain amount of time with a work) suggests it is the viewer's responsibility to experience the artwork in the most worthwhile possible way. It also assumes equal access to museums and other venues, and comfortable viewing within those venues. It expects viewers have the time to give to being with a work—time that might be equally well-spent reading a didactic text, or moving on to neighbouring works, or just being not-in-a-gallery. We are variously accorded these luxuries—not only along professional lines (working in a museum, for example, can be an incredibly easy, rewarding way to spend a lot of time with one work over and over again) but also, and especially, along class and ability lines. Put simply, it is not always viable for an individual to go into a museum and stand with an artwork for an hour.

A significant element of the artistic ecology of a city like Toronto hinges on demands made of artists and arts workers that extend beyond the production of their work. In the contemporary moment, their duties also include social media, personal branding, being seen at parties, organizing events, carving out a clear voice for themselves. These are "extracurriculars," affective and digital labour that cascades piece by piece, hour by hour.

Seeing work is the critic's unpaid labour, and this is troubling because one of the most useful roles of the critic is to see a significant amount of work, and make passionate recommendations, informed critical analyses, and social observations about the value and importance of the work in its time and place.

Most critics have a strong sense of what kind of work interests them, but all too often, this is the only work they see. We practice an obscene amount of criticism by omission in Canada, privileging writing that endorses work and taking the failure to write about a work as a silent condemnation. But my own looking at work throughout this exercise betrays something I suspected was true of myself: I look more at work I care about already. I spend more time with work that already interests me. Criticism by omission is also sometimes criticism by pure blindness, an ironic lack of criticality about our

own filters. In the absence of stable wages for writers, critical time is at a premium and critics risk failing to see things that may matter deeply to their communities.

So I confess to being slightly critical of looking slowly: certainly I don't feel that all contemporary art demands the same slow-looking as a painting. I wonder in what cases digital images are appropriate substitutes. And if we suggest all truly critical looking be slow, how do we accommodate the expansive viewing we expect of critics in order to cement them as taste-makers and evaluators?

While initially I hoped the *Mobile Critical Marathon* could un-do some of my self-censorship, what I experienced in the galleries was an increase in self-censorship. I found that the most significant portion of my writing practice happens in the afterwards of seeing work— in the turning it over again and again in my head, in the self-provocation and anxiety and difficulty of communicating the then-distant experience of being with the work.

I had hoped for a breed of rogue criticism in line with projects that value the experiential, and reject the critic's absolute authority. I was prompted partly by Jennifer Doyle's provocation to critics—"what are our responsibilities toward work that quite literally takes us out of our comfort zone," she asks, "and toward the audiences that seek out those experiences?" (Doyle 2013)

Performance lives in discomfort, and Doyle asks that critics interrogate their discomfort by re-framing what drives them to become the audience or not. Seeing so much work in a day might not only be a productive exaggeration of the terms of my engagement with the art community as a critic, but also a testimony to some of the regular, everyday discomforts of seeing work: being rushed, being confused, having to leave, not finding the gallery, being self-conscious talking with gallery attendants, having to make judgements based on taste and existing critical shorthand rather than long-quiet contemplation.

As I untangle my own performance of art criticism, I turn again to Lori Waxman's *60 wrd/min art critic*, a performative writing experiment in which Waxman guaranteed reviews to artists on a first-come, first-served basis. She sought to interrogate the relationship between critic and artist and question the purpose of the short review. Waxman also provided a platform for serious criticism of regional and emerging artists whose work often falls outside of the purview of publications like *Artforum*.

I came to Waxman's statement about her 2010 project only after writing a description of my own, and was struck by the uncanny similarities (I'll call this both an uncomfortable channeling of Waxman and a commitment to parallel goals). "Why do this project?" Waxman asks. "Because too much art goes unrecorded, and habit often dictates what a critic sees and therefore writes about… In terms of quantity, the project deals comically and literally with the idea that there are too many artists and galleries, and not enough critical venues to cover it all."

While Waxman's venture has brought her to Brooklyn, Kansas City, Chicago, Portland, and *Documenta 13*, in Kassel, mine has only taken me around Toronto. Waxman's artists come to her for reviews, and watch her typing in real time, while I go to galleries and listeners tune in, from anywhere. I buy a day pass for the TTC, plan a walk on Google maps, and pack a bag with snacks and warm clothing. Waxman and I have each produced, in an attempt to deal with the same concerns, performances which replicate vastly different but equally difficult conditions of precarity. In Waxman's experiment, artists come to her and she must not stop writing, must not leave, must appease them. In mine, I plead with galleries to put me on their press lists, offer sincere reviews, show up unannounced and talk quietly, seemingly to no one, always a little bit tongue-tied. I do this until I am done. It feels a lot like real life. I imagine it does for Waxman, too. That's what feels futile and powerful about it, all at once.

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KING

(A PORTRAIT OF MICHAEL JACKSON):

or,

the Global Image Politics of the Multi-Channel Video Installation

ANASTASIA HOWE BUKOWSKI

In his 1990 essay "Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Culture Economy," anthropologist Arjuan Appadurai evinces a problematic at the heart of contemporary global interactions: that of "the tension between cultural homogenization and cultural heterogenization" (Appadurai 1990, 295). Questioning the validity of center-periphery models of global cultural and economic flow that stake the United States as their objective nucleus, Appadurai instead elucidates an image of the postmodern global cultural economy made up of an imbricated network of multi-directional "*scapes*." The *scape* accounts for a framework of global cultural circulation based on fluidity and "indigenization," acknowledging the potentiality for mass media objects to travel in irregular patterns and become translated and mediated based on their repatriation within local communities or economies (Appadurai 1990, 307). Unraveling the given hegemonic forces between global media apparatus and consumer, Appadurai presents a model of cultural exchange that is a direct alternative to one of strict American imperialism and equally contingent on the competing interests and agencies of different formations of actors.

This concern for modeling the movement, absorption, and indigenization of Western media objects is at the root of South African artist Candice Breitz's 2005 sixteen-channel video installa-

tion, *King (A Portrait of Michael Jackson)*. Documenting sixteen a-cappella re-performances of Jackson's 1982 album *Thriller* by a group of his German fans, the work asks similar questions of the relationship between individual agency and the determinations of global capital. Curiously, a substantial amount of the critical discourse focused on Breitz's work has aligned it with the model that Appadurai's work attempts to complicate, reducing these performances to acts of mimicry and evidence of the mass subject's over-identification with an authoritative American popular culture. Through a close formal analysis of *King*'s subject matter and materiality, I aim to provide a more nuanced method of reading Breitz's work in line with Appadurai's notion of global flow as well as more recent considerations of digital circulation, mediation, and networking. Here I argue that *King* might be better understood not in terms of its particular meaning or symbolic structure, but in light of the pulse of global interactions that have and continue to inform its production and circulation as an art object.

King begins in complete darkness and silence. Following a short moment of suspension, the sixteen horizontally-arranged, meter-high plasma screens that comprise the work simultaneously come to life, revealing a row of individuals tightly framed from the knees up against a black backdrop. The assembled group variably sways, dances, and hums a series of indiscernible tunes, before spontaneously bursting into an a-cappella rendition of Michael Jackson's "Wanna Be Startin' Somethin'"—the opening track of his 1982 album *Thriller*. Over the ensuing forty-two minutes of *King*, the collective of eight men and eight women go on to simultaneously re-perform the entirety of *Thriller* in single, extended takes, with Breitz only subtly editing their individual performances in order to maintain consistent temporal sequencing between the sixteen separate audiovisual channels.

King comprises one of four parts in a micro-series of video works that Breitz also produced in collaboration with fans of Madonna, Bob Marley, and John Lennon.**[1]** Shot in a Berlin recording studio, she recruited *King*'s volunteer performers by advertising the project in German and Austrian magazines, newspapers, public notice boards, and on Michael Jackson fan websites. Based on written statements by fans describing their affective relationships to Jackson's music and status as a cultural icon, Breitz selected the sixteen participants that appear in *King*--not due to their musical acumen or performative finesse, but in light of the perceived depth of their fandom. As a collective affiliated by a mutual fanaticism, the resulting group shows considerable diversity, crossing gender and racial lines and spanning a broad range of ages, especially among its female performers, which speaks as much to the racial fluidity and androgyny of Jackson's public image as to the extensive scope of his audience.

Assuming its status as a work of re-performance, then, *King* is entirely ambivalent; what appears to be an experience of near-religious elation for some is utterly paralyzing for others. Just as several of the performers close their eyes, completely absorbed in their singing, two women in white and pink shirts shyly and uncomfortably deliberate through

their performances, standing stiffly in place and flashing only brief suggestions of a smile. Moreover, while the aesthetic and kinetic agencies of certain performers—specifically the males decked out in *Thriller*-era red leather jackets and single white gloves—cleave closely to Jackson's original, others depart from this image entirely, perhaps most notably the woman who belly dances her way through the work. *King*, an assemblage of component parts, results not in a chorus of sameness but in a discordant cacophony of bodies and voices that shift aurally in out of tune and visually in and out of synch over the extent of its forty-two minutes. With Breitz herself noting that she offered her participants no directives in documenting their performances, *King* forms a shrewd portrait of the ways in which, as the artist puts it, "[users of the culture] translate material into their own terms," implicating a process of 'indigenization' in the dispersal of mass content from American icon to German fan (Neri 2005, 19). This notion of translation is further evoked in the uncanny aural presence of Jackson's famous lyrics being sung by non-native speakers of English, their German accents producing a literally foreign experience of *Thriller*.

In light of the differential activation and mediation of *Thriller* made visible through the variety of these re-performances, it is curious to read some of the critical conversation that *King* has inspired. Taking a strong cue from Horkheimer and Adorno's notion of the oppressive dynamics of the "culture industry," Okwui Enwezor reads Breitz's work as evidence of "the fan's over-identification with the remote or absent pop star" and "the meaninglessness of mass entertainment" whose apparatus provides a fleeting, yet ultimately valueless, satiation for audiences (Horkheimer and Adorno 2002, 94-136; Enwezor 2010, 40-41). Similarly, Beatrice von Bismarck has commented on the "scripted" quality of these performances that "[fit] themselves into a predefined set of appearances and forms of expression," demonstrating the subjugating effects of global pop-cultural image media (Bismarck 2010, 55).

What I argue here is that Frankfurt School "culture industry"-inspired readings undertaken by Enwezor and others offer a limited and reductive understanding of Breitz's work. Basing their analyses on the unilateral system of global cultural economics that Appadurai unsettles through his more flexible notion of the *scape*, the ironic hyper-conservatism of this Marxist model plainly does not admit to the possibility of these participants' agency or self-consciousness, forcing them into overdetermined roles of cultural subordination at the hands of a globalized late capitalism. Following the cues of John Fiske, we might instead generatively view *King* as an example of how "popular culture is not consumption, it is culture – the active process of generating and circulating meanings and pleasures within a social system" (Fiske 1989, 25-26). Thus, moving beyond a neo-Adorno critical cadre will require close attention be paid to how the meta-structure of *King*'s visual format and materiality are shaped by the very multi-directional global cultural flows that its subject matter thematizes, treating Breitz's work in terms of the networked dynamics of its production and dissemination as a global art object.

These enacted themes of cultural mediation, networking, and dissemination through acts of re-performance become apparent when we consider the format that Breitz's work takes in the gallery: that of the multi-channel spatial montage. Differing from the cinematic form of the 'temporal montage,' which sequences images one after another in order to highlight an accelerated passage of time, the spatial montage instead collates multiple images within the same plane in order to produce an illusion of shared space or to effect a dramatic visual comparison. In Breitz's case, it manages both.**[2]** Allowing for performances that were initially documented in isolation to become coextensive with one another by arranging them in a tight horizontal row, *King* is wrought by a structural tension between multiplicity and singularity. On the one hand, this notion of making multiple what was formerly singular is realized in the act of documenting sixteen discrete re-performances of the same source material.

However, only once these multiple performances are juxtaposed in space—that is to say, made into a coherent, unified format—can we effectively acknowledge the differences existent between them. For example, the two neighboring screens documenting the shy woman in the white shirt and the woman who jubilantly belly dances her way through the work starkly emphasize the visual and kinetic diversity found within these re-performances, disrupting the "scripted" or undifferentiated understanding of Breitz's material offered in an orthodox Marxist critique.

Lev Manovich clarifies this tension between multiplicity and singularity by linking the structure of the spatial montage to contemporary concerns for the global. As he writes in *The Language of New Media*, the spatial montage has experienced a considerable resurgence in use following postmodern theorizations of a global condition of "simultaneity" or, using a term he borrows from Michel Foucault, the "side-by-side," evoking similar questions of the homogenization of global cultures effected by American late capitalist imperialism (Manovich 2001, 322). In the case of *King*, we can see cultural simultaneity evoked through the spatial installation and synchronization of the work's component audiovisual channels, recalling how individuals otherwise separated by time and space might commonly experience and be subject to the same popular media. However, much like Appadurai who signifies the possibility for difference within global patterns of 'indigenization,' Manovich notes that the aggregation of material within a spatial montage need not construct a seamless image of shared global or virtual space. Rather, he states that "borders between different worlds do not have to be erased . . . individual layers can retain their separate identities rather than being merged into a single space; different worlds can clash semantically rather than form a single universe" (Manovich 2001, 158). This explicit refusal on Manovich's part to merely equate spatial co-presence with homogeneity and shared experience can also be seen in the affective disjunctures and literal borders of each plasma screen that constrict and separate the sixteen performances assembled in *King*, resisting their reduction to a totalized mass subject. As such, we might come to understand re-performance here as a generative tool for differential engagement and translation rather than a coercive exercise reiterating the visual power of the popular, a notion reflected in Fiske's statement that "the dominant cannot control totally the meanings that the people may construct" (Fiske 1989, 45).

David Joselit takes up similar concerns in his 2012 book *After Art*, in which he argues that the power and value of global art and media objects ought to be understood not at their initial points of dissemination, but rather based on "what they do once they enter circulation in heterogeneous networks" such as the Internet and global art market (Joselit 2012, xiv). Joselit's model of the network, which is indebted to Bruno Latour's ***Actor-Network Theory***, asserts the ability for art objects to act as common nodes simultaneously linking individuals, spaces, and institutions, establishing a wide variety of connections and, from this, power—or what he terms "buzz."**[3]** For Joselit, this poses less of a question about

what art and cultural objects *mean* than where they might *go* and what they might *do*. Building on the multi-directional global cultural economics of Appadurai, Joselit imagines the late capitalist conditions of popular cultural objects—"saturation through mass circulation—the status of being *everywhere at once*"—as the result of a series of unplanned and undirected patterns of circulation not unilaterally driven by traditional media channels (Joselit 2012, 16). Evoking this state of the 'everywhere' in the multiple spatialities of its assembled screens and entangled medley of voices and bodies, *King*'s visual and performative structure seem to follow from Joselit's argument that we take a more generous and even oppositional approach to understanding the circulation of images and media objects. Rather than treating its contained re-performances as evidence of the indomitable effects of mass commercialization, we might treat them as the result of the opening up of *Thriller* to an image commons, framed by what Joselit terms "networks where links can cross space, time, genre, and scale in surprising and multiple ways" (Joselit 2012, 89).

Joselit locates the networked aesthetic within the digital communication technologies and global distribution channels of the art world. As he articulates in his book, images and other media content linked across time and space (and in our case gender, race, and transnational borders) may "[experience] cascading chains of relocation and remediation," an echo of Appadurai's notion of the indigenizing, multi-directional *mediascape* (Joselit 2012, 14). In these terms, *King* embodies a networked quality both in terms of its subject matter and materiality. On the one hand, the manifold re-performances of *Thriller* that the work documents reflect the status of Jackson's material as a kind of networked object, narrativizing the ways in which images and other media may be circulated for reasons other than pure financial profit (the hyper-capitalism of the art world aside) and remain subject to change and translation dependent on the emergent and uncoordinated behavior of its users. Accordingly, we can view *King*'s status as an art object that has been exhibited worldwide as an additional link in the '*dynamic chain*' (a term Joselit poaches from French artist Pierre Huyghe) of *Thriller*'s circulatory network, further relocating and remediating Jackson's work by introducing it to the hallowed spaces of the art gallery and museum. Thus, the 'power' of Jackson's original is reworked in *King* not as a matter of its immense financial success, but its ability to maintain a recognized vitality and "reverberation" in what Joselit terms its continuity as an "*after*image" that might be critically re-performed and dispersed between far-flung individuals and institutions (Joselit 2012, 91).

There are, of course, reasons to be wary of the quasi-utopianism of Joselit's views. As Alexander Galloway and Eugene Thacker note, the network model typically carries with it a rhetoric of freedom that does not duly account for global imbalances of power and the unequal distribution of agency among its constituent actors. As much as global networks suggest the existence of a system of more distributed control, Galloway warns that "the mere existence of networks does not imply democracy or equality" (Galloway and Thacker 2007, 13). For example, even while Breitz's participants exhibit agency and self-consciousness in their respective re-performances of mass cultural content, *King* offers no real sense of their political subjectivities and agencies outside the reproductive bounds of the work. Even while forming part of an open and generative network in which new meanings might be created and dispersed through generative acts of re-performance, as a process and platform *King* is altogether fleeting in nature; we are witnessing but a mere, unrepresentative moment in these individuals' lives. Moreover, the question of *King*'s movement between and establishment of new sites of meaning is completely subject to the accelerated hyper-capitalist flows of the art market and exhibition circuit. Unlike the effusive *everywhere* of *Thriller* as a mass cultural object, *King*'s reproductive value and circulation as a "migrant" global art object depends entirely upon the acquisition of and access to capital on the part of both public and private institutions, recalling what Galloway and Thacker term the inconsistent and misleading "horizontality" of the bi-directional, global network, which often results in

the recentralization rather than destabilization of power (Galloway and Thacker 2007, 18). Evidenced nowhere better than in the stunned faces of female Jackson fans in white and pink shirts, the network cannot be a source of agency in itself.

With these more contentious features of global networks in mind, it is perhaps appropriate to conclude by considering how Breitz has directly addressed these contained issues of reproduction, engagement, and circulation in her continued reformatting of *King*'s media status. Complementing her use of the multi-channel spatial montage as a means of complicating the perceived homogeneity of cultural consumption in our globalized present and asserting the generative power of re-performance, Breitz has contested the spaces in which viewers might come to encounter her own work by uploading ***King*** to her public Vimeo page and making it freely available for viewing and download. [21] This intermedia shift, a critical feature of *King* that has heretofore gone undiscussed, implicates it within a critical wave of recent "post-internet" art practices, described by artist Artie Vierkant as "projects which move seamlessly from physical representation to Internet representation" (Vierkant 2010, 10). Such an intermedia shift does not necessarily result in a horizontal expansion in *King*'s 'everywhere' status, so much as expose the work to further ontological questions concerning the relationship between internet-based circulatory channels and the actions of agency and translation on the part of users, who might access the work at any point a digital connection allows.

In ***"The Image-Object Post-Internet,"*** a text that serves as a kind of manifesto for internet-based art practices, Vierkant writes that "the cultural status of objects online is influenced by the way they are transmitted socially and the variety of communities they come to inhabit" (Vierkant 2010, 8). Much like the source material of *Thriller*, which assumes its value and meaning in *King* not due to its original aura and commercial saturation but in light of its adaptability to translation and 'indigenization' at the hands of Jackson's German fans, Breitz's transformation of a material work into dispersed digital data opens it up to similar potentialities of being resignified and absorbed in surprising ways. Vierkant characterizes our current moment as one in which "*everything is anything else*," a perspective drawn out in Breitz's strategy of making content that transitions from physical to online space, refusing representational fixity or formal continuity in this process (Vierkant 2010, 4). While as an open network the Internet carries with it a string of power relations negating its image as a utopian point of entry and access—present in, for example, the hierarchical/corporate management styles of major content sharing platforms such as Vimeo, YouTube, and Tumblr—it nonetheless proposes a multi-directional point of departure for digital images and multimedia content. Vierkant argues that the image-object online is "self-aware of its art context and built to be shared and cited," placing a primacy on patterns of access, consumption, and potential reproduction rather than the fixity and stability of original cultural objects such as both *Thriller* and *King* (Vierkant 2010, 10).

By exposing itself as a moving product, reverberating and stagnating in unlikely corners of both real and digital space, Jackson's *Thriller* and by extension Breitz's *King* draw attention to the bi-directional and often oppositional reproductive circuits that temper contemporary cultural consumption and exchange. Far from Enwezor's understanding of *King* as evidence of "the stultifying ennui that pervades the reception and consumption of commodity culture" within late capitalism, we might instead see how these documented acts of re-performance evince a form of cultural enjoyment and agency that reactivates the object of mass culture in surprising and unpredictable ways (Enwezor 2010, 33). In effect, we might ask ourselves: who controls the rights to representation implicit in the *everywhere* status of the global art or cultural object? Looking to the belly dancer, the impersonator, the shy woman in the white shirt, how might we come to understand re-performance and remediation as acts that disrupt rather than merely reproduce the dominant structures and relations of power that characterize globalized cultural consumption in the present?

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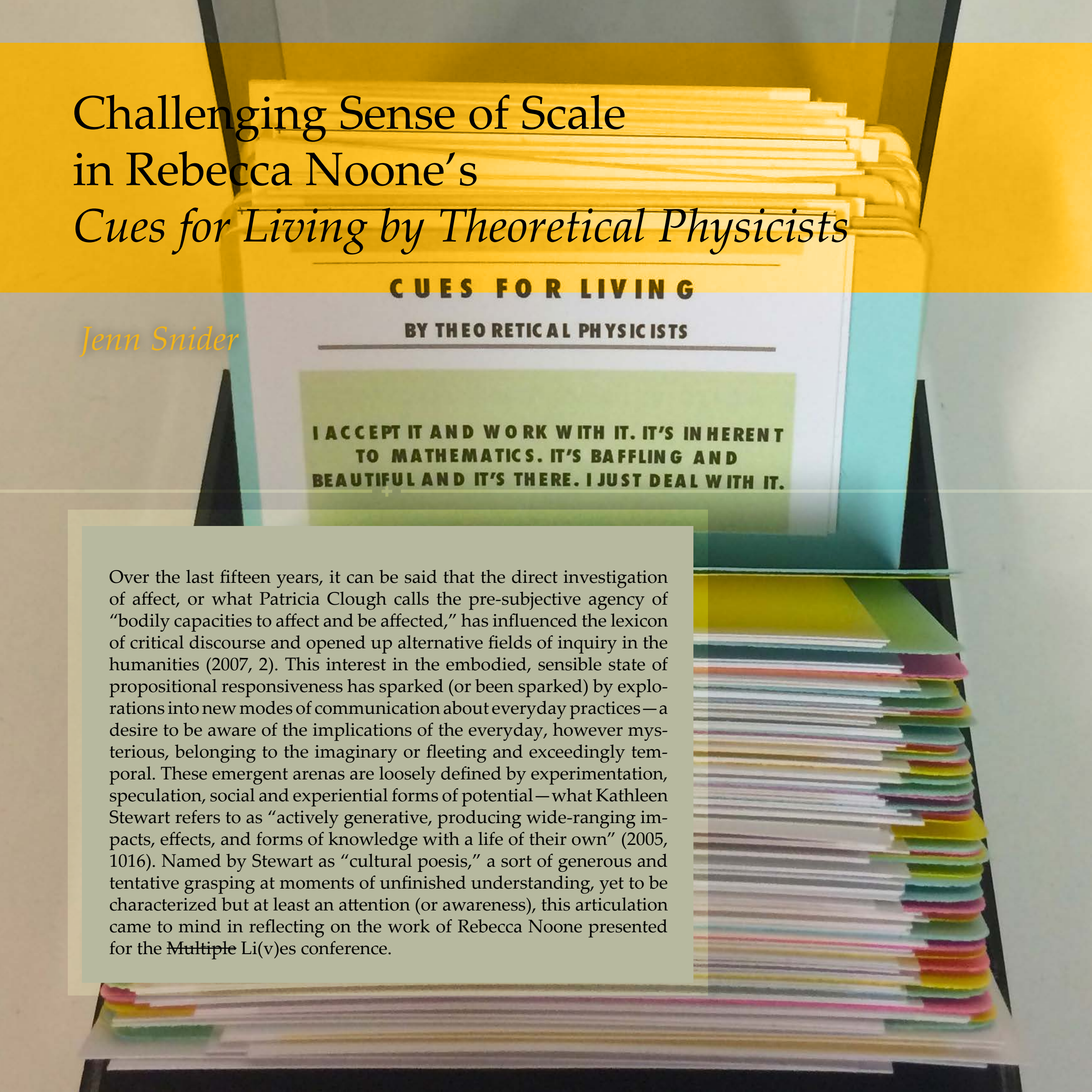
CUE FOR LIVING

BY THEORETICAL PHYSICISTS

THE TRUTHS OF PHYSICS DON'T OFFER ALL
THAT MUCH GUIDANCE AS WE NAVIGATE

Challenging Sense of Scale in Rebecca Noone's *Cues for Living by Theoretical Physicists*

Jenn Snider



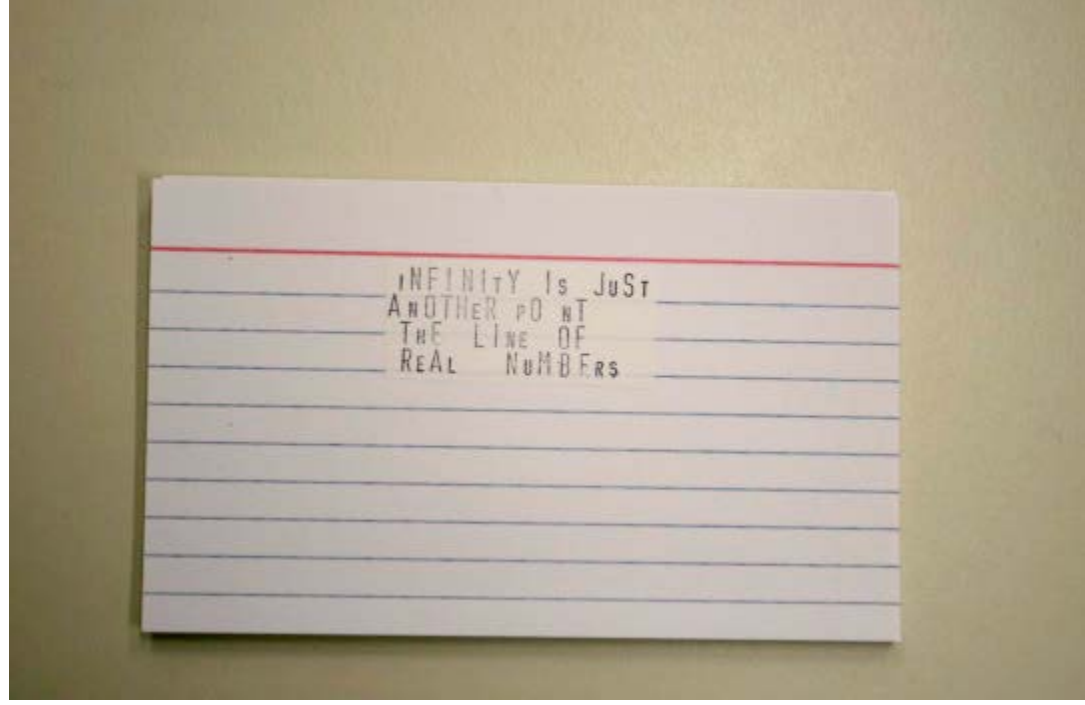
Over the last fifteen years, it can be said that the direct investigation of affect, or what Patricia Clough calls the pre-subjective agency of "bodily capacities to affect and be affected," has influenced the lexicon of critical discourse and opened up alternative fields of inquiry in the humanities (2007, 2). This interest in the embodied, sensible state of propositional responsiveness has sparked (or been sparked) by explorations into new modes of communication about everyday practices—a desire to be aware of the implications of the everyday, however mysterious, belonging to the imaginary or fleeting and exceedingly temporal. These emergent arenas are loosely defined by experimentation, speculation, social and experiential forms of potential—what Kathleen Stewart refers to as "actively generative, producing wide-ranging impacts, effects, and forms of knowledge with a life of their own" (2005, 1016). Named by Stewart as "cultural poesis," a sort of generous and tentative grasping at moments of unfinished understanding, yet to be characterized but at least an attention (or awareness), this articulation came to mind in reflecting on the work of Rebecca Noone presented for the ~~Multiple~~ Li(v)es conference.

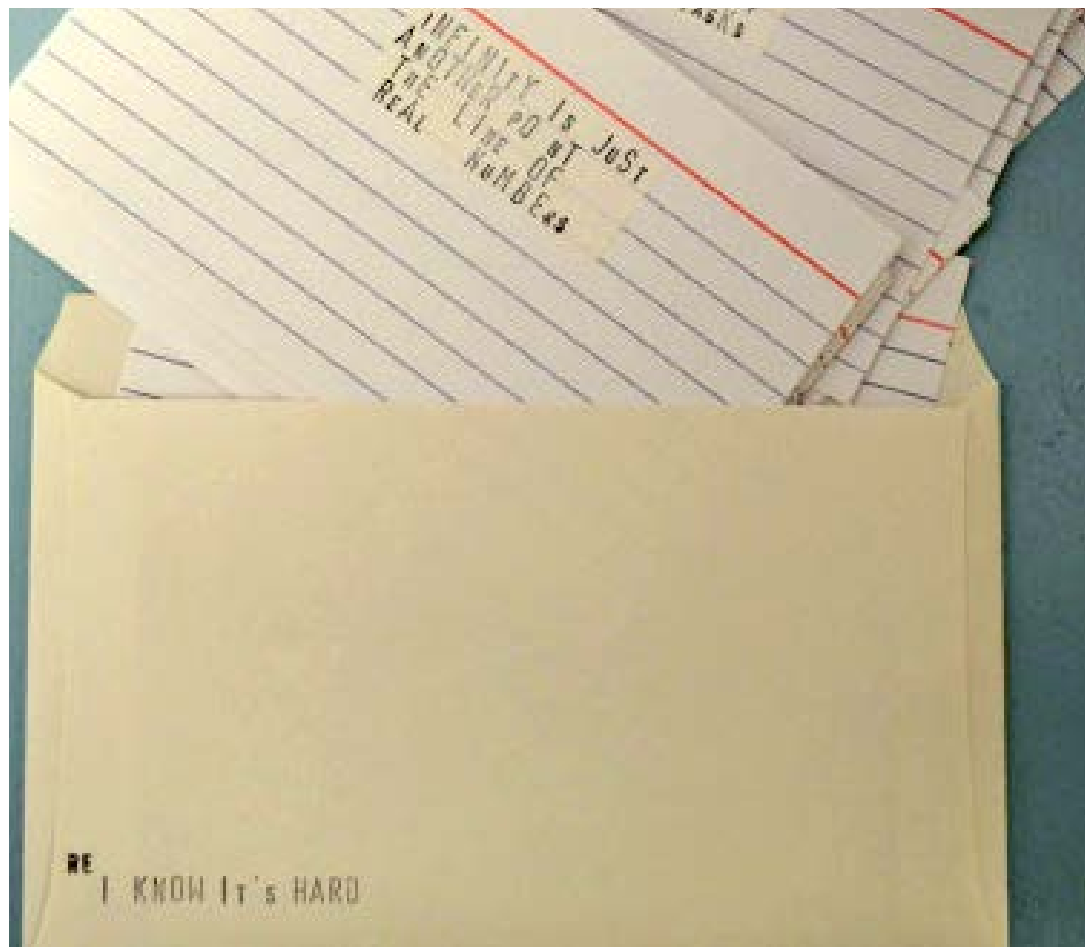
Noone's ongoing project, *Cues for Living by Theoretical Physicists* (presented for the conference as both a profile and simultaneous intervention), takes as its subject both the sometimes wistful narrative of the everyday pitted against the power and majesty of the natural world—further, the notion of the individual in light of the vast and interconnected theoretical realm(s) of the universe. Referencing these vast distances, the questions asked by Noone's work seem to echo those that Stewart poses:

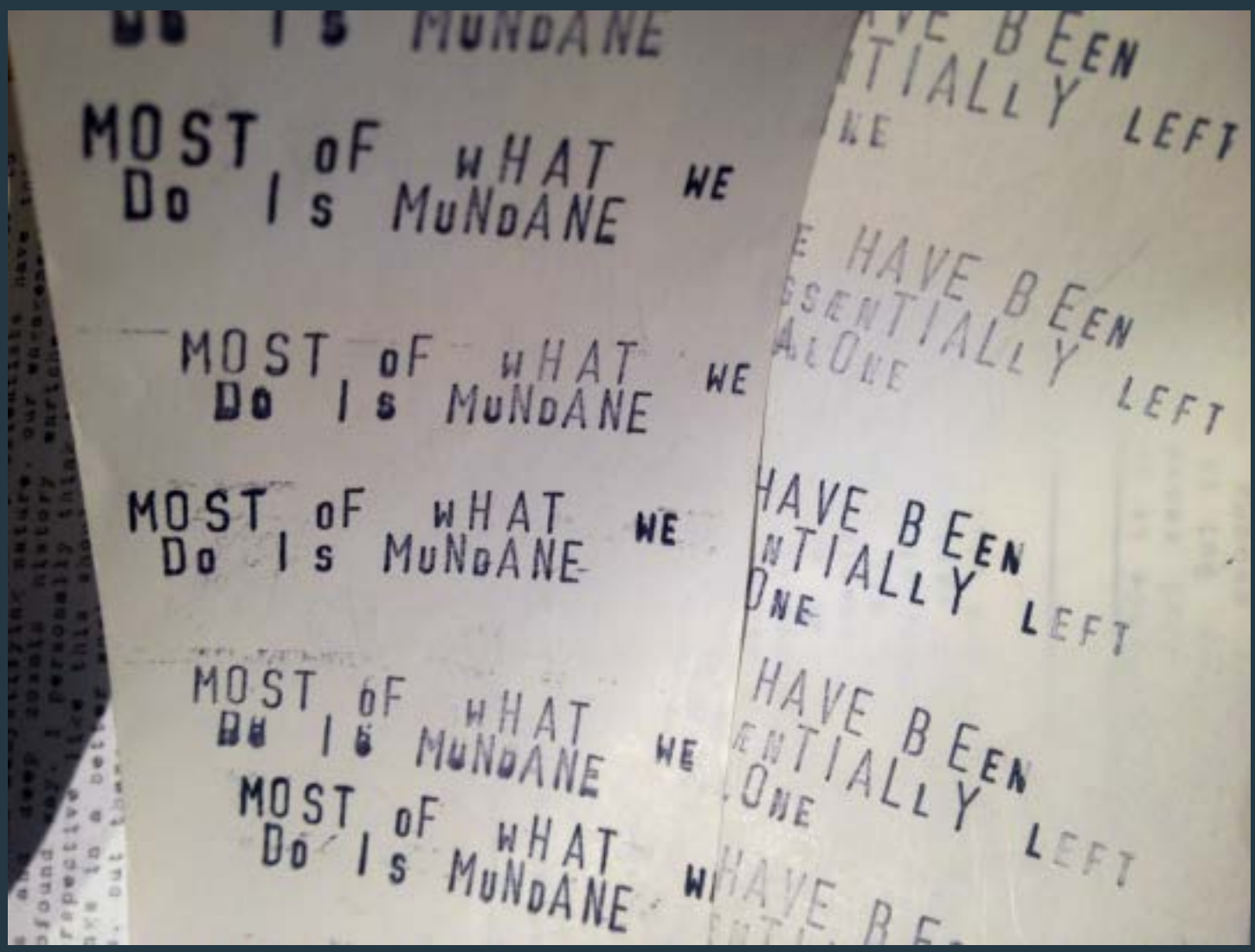
> What is going on? What floating influences now travel through public routes of circulation and come to roost in the seemingly private domains of hearts, homes, and dreams? What forces are becoming sensate as forms, styles, desires, and practices? What does it mean to say that particular events and strands of affect generate impacts? . . . What does cultural poesis look like? (Stewart 2005, 1016).

Fittingly, in writing and speaking about her project, Noone describes its origin as emerging from a series of her own questions—questions that she eventually sent by email to hundreds of theoretical physicists on faculty at some of the world's greatest universities. As a project that arose after finding herself trapped by a blizzard in the town of Skagaströnd, having arrived for an artist residency in the northwest of Iceland, Noone encountered an unexpected concern with the necessities of survival. With the harshness of the climate absurdly contrasting with banal, everyday routines like grocery shopping, she describes her outlook as a classic existential crisis, and the circumstances as follows:

> ... having situated myself on the continental divide, in a landscape of terrestrial and celestial majesty, and yet still being confronted [by] the banality of existence... [this] sharp contrast in how I engaged with my immediate environment seemed apparent as I fussed over which shape of pasta noodle to buy and which northern, tinned vegetable would accompany it, whilst under the watchful eye of glaciers and fjords and volcanoes (Noone).



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Though Noone says she tends to “shy away from spectacle” in her art practice, while in Iceland she was surrounded by it (Noone). Struck, as she says, by the contrast of her everyday concerns in the face of a perhaps more pressing matter of survival, Noone’s already prominent artistic interests in the interactions of art and science (a focus of her ongoing practice) took hold. In an effort to confront her desire to develop a new perspective, and understand how others whom she holds in high regard dealt with their own confrontations of the practical in light of the emergent and extraordinary, Noone wrote the following email:

My name is Rebecca Noone. I am a Canadian artist, currently based out of Skagaströnd, Iceland. I'm sending this email to theoretical and experimental physicists from around the world in the hope of gaining new insights in old existential questions.

I feel that there is much to learn from you and other physicists who work towards creating windows into unchartered regions of reality and then manage to participate in the ordinary acts of maintenance and decision-making that characterize the day-to-day. I'm curious about how you negotiate everyday minutiae while professionally studying the simultaneous miracle and ineffectuality of human existence in an ever-expanding uni/multiverse. How do you push physics to its breaking point and then sit in traffic jams or order off menus or decide what to put on your morning toast? Not to undermine these acts. I think they inspire me as someone who struggles with even the most inconsequential of decisions.

You can respond to these questions in a single word or many sentences; it can be an intuitive reaction or a carefully considered reply. I am compiling these (all anonymous, unless citation is requested) with the intention to create a public art installation in Iceland. Thank you in advance for taking the time to consider your participation in this project. Feel free to ask me any questions.

So- how do you negotiate the everyday while professionally set against the backdrop of infinity?

Sincerely,

Straightaway, and over the course of many days, Noone received her answers. In all, out of over 500 emails sent, she received 96 responses from physicists at institutions such as Stanford, MIT, CERN, Cambridge, University of Toronto, University of British Columbia, Harvard, and Johns Hopkins. One rule Noone created for her project was that for every response, she needed to write back “to ensure that they knew they weren’t speaking to a robot and to encourage further discussion.” In some cases, Noone says, relationships were built around the “context of sharing,” which was simultaneously “placed within the wider constructions or mis-constructions of this kind of private/public binary” where “[we] deal with the traffic, the grocery line, the general commuting, all these sort of mundane acts ... while professionally occupying these larger scales” (Noone).

Here are some examples of responses that Noone received:

1

I had 3 children before I had my doctoral (the third two months before), so I just had to learn to focus on my work, sometimes with a noisy background and often with interruptions required by child care. The rest is trivial in comparison!

2

Sometimes it's hard to reconcile what I believe and what I feel. Fast forward to May 1999, I'm waiting for the stork to arrive with my first son. I feel anxious and hope that the delivery will end well. But at the same time, my physics calculations have convinced me that it will both end well and badly in different parallel universes. In that case, what do I mean by hoping? Perhaps I mean that I hope that I'll end up in one of those parallel universes where things went well? No, that's nonsense since I'll end up in all of these parallel universes, and I'm jubilant in some and devastated in others. Perhaps I mean that I hope the delivery will go well in 'most' parallel universes? No, that's nonsense as well since the percentage where things will go well in principle can be calculated in principle using the Schrödinger equation and it's illogical to have hopes about something that's already predetermined. But apparently, and perhaps fortunately, my emotions aren't completely logical.

3

There are days I am absorbed with administration and dealing with people. All my problems come from people; and all the good things come from them, too... I do not worry about infinity. I have grown used to it; I accept it and work with it. It's inherent to mathematics. It's baffling and beautiful and it's there. I just deal with it.

4

I am doing physics for many years. Theories we develop, test, [and] use to describe [the] Universe are as usual as instructions for a kettle… There is no effort therefore to connect the two worlds. For me—they are part of one and the same world… My world overlaps with yours greatly…

5

…most of what we (physicists) do is mundane. I can spend months trying to smooth out the vibrations in a telescope, so we can make better observations of the early universe. Months of vibrations can be even less exciting than morning toast.

6

An astrophysicist and her boyfriend were walking at night under a beautiful star- studded sky and man looks up in wonder and asks his girlfriend what do you think about when you see all those infinite stars? And the astrophysicist looks up and briefly says, bread and butter.

7

We are VERY little – despite our consciousness trying to tell us that we're the most important thing in all of the universe. But certainly thoughtful non-scientists know this, too… We are each little fibers, entwined with those around us --- and we're part of something whose magnitude is beyond comprehension. To the scientists comes the realization that the whole braid is actually tiny and inconsequential compared to the rest of what's there… All of physics is necessarily and inherently approximate, and very little physics produced over the ages has proven to be fundamentally incorrect, at least from some perspective. Nevertheless, in some obvious sense, it is more "true" than any of the truths that we rely on in charting our lives.

In all, the tone of the physicists' engagement was reflective of Noone's own curiosity and confusion. "Many of the emails I received seemed bound in the tedium of existence" she says, despite appearing appreciative that their knowledge could apply to others outside of the world that they lived in, where "so much of their research, though based on this wonder, is so encumbered by the monotony of administration within the institutionalized neo-liberal academic context … it becomes almost impossible to remember that the universe exists in the first place" (Noone).

Since her time in Iceland, Noone has developed several formats in which she presents the responses she received, with intentions of sharing the most poignant and relatable answers; for example, she has presented them as a Rolodex of what she calls "cues for living" and also produced a bookwork. For Multiple Li(v)es, Noone performed an intervention on the academic environment by installing discreet card-holders around the main university facility, which displayed small business cards with cues for living printed on them. A take-away sentiment about the everyday, Noone describes her choice of presentation as an effort to "reduce these experiences to its simplest bits of information, following the Fluxus tradition of the de-aestheticized art … part of a trajectory of what George Brecht and George Maciunas were doing with the Event Score, such as *Word Event* and *Flute Solo* which are presented

as single, white index cards with black mimeographed print that work to highlight the tedium and the futility of it all—reducing these experiences of poetry, performance, and music to their smallest unit. A one-bit card… a reductive provocation" (Noone).

Having performed interventions of public spaces before—in supermarkets, coffee shops, schools, waiting areas—inserting the cues in social space is Noone's way of offsetting the stresses she associates with negotiating "the scale of the real, the imagined, the imagined-real, and the real-imagined" (Noone). By displaying the cards for circulation and treating the shared anecdotes and bits of advice as information that emancipates the tension of the trite, yet reveals the remarkable in the ordinary, by making these cards available as playful tokens or totems of voluntary and unexpected empathy, they also serve to perform in "defiance of the logic of science as we sort of navigate our everyday" (Noone).

For Noone, the particular experience and outcomes of engaging with physicists brought her to a resolution: "Meaning comes in all forms, from the seemingly mundane to the sublime, but it all matters because we make it matter. The microscopic scale and the vast expanse of the cosmos are inextricably linked by virtue of being governed by the same laws" (Noone). Drawing once more on Stewart, whose meditation on the stresses of living an ordinary life filled with odd moments that cause you to "raise your head in surprise or alarm at the uncanny sensation of a half-known influence," speaks to a sense of shared urgency with Noone—where exploring the edges of experience and "trudging the rough terrain of bodies and the sensuous accumulation of impacts" gives a rich fascination and "sense that something is happening" (Stewart 2005, 1018-9).

Thus, in art as in life, "What animates it is not a particular message but rather the more basic need to forcefully perform the unrecognized impact of things" (Stewart 2005, 1023). Our everyday as artists, observers, scientists, or otherwise affected (re)actors can aid in our navigation and identification of the traces we leave as we weave through our day (Stewart 2005, 1023). The everyday is what consumes our waking and living awareness, defining our ability to set each sensibility against the world and be rewarded in return. It is to sense and be sensed, and to have access to what is perhaps infinite, in possibility.

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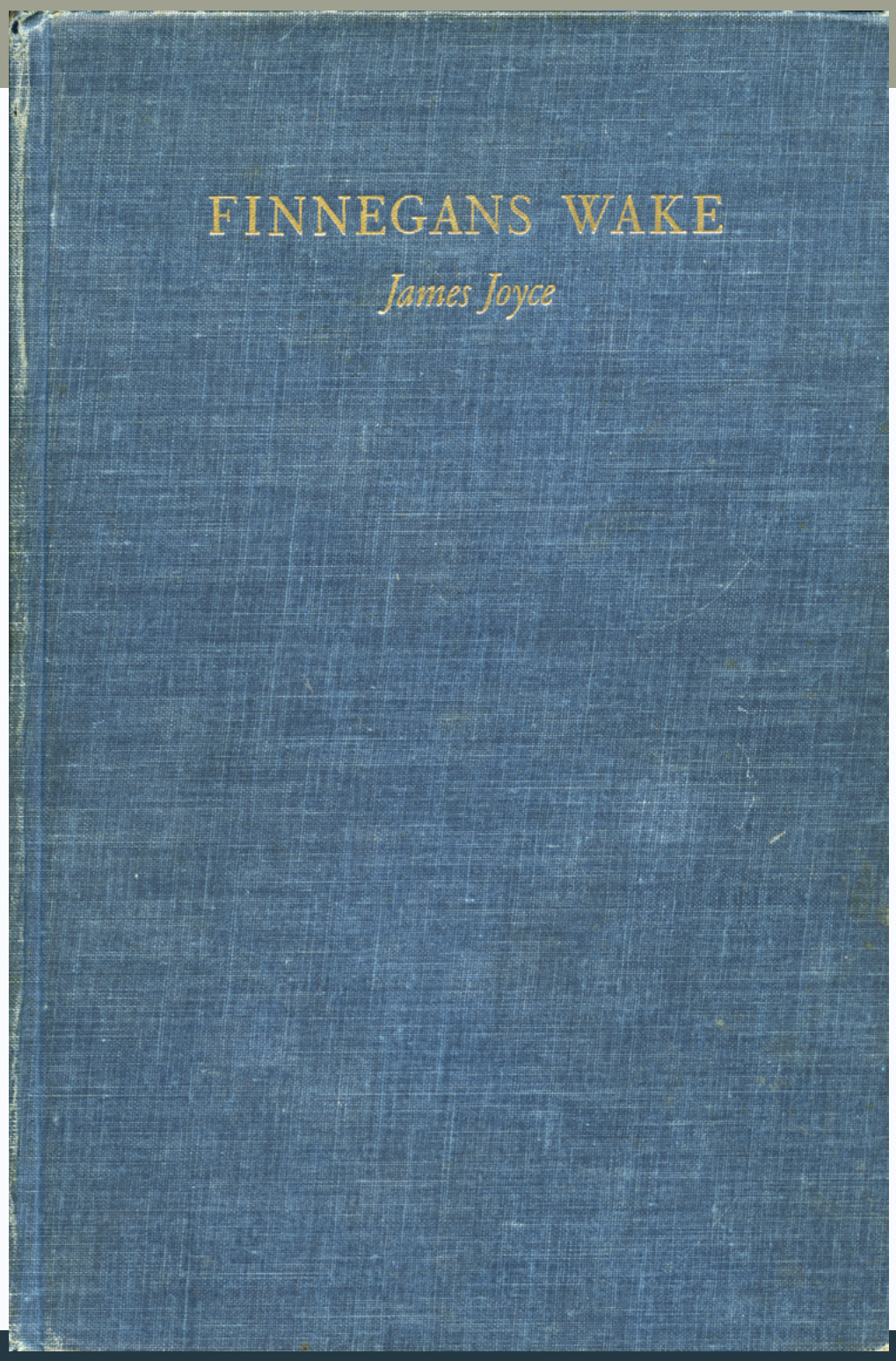
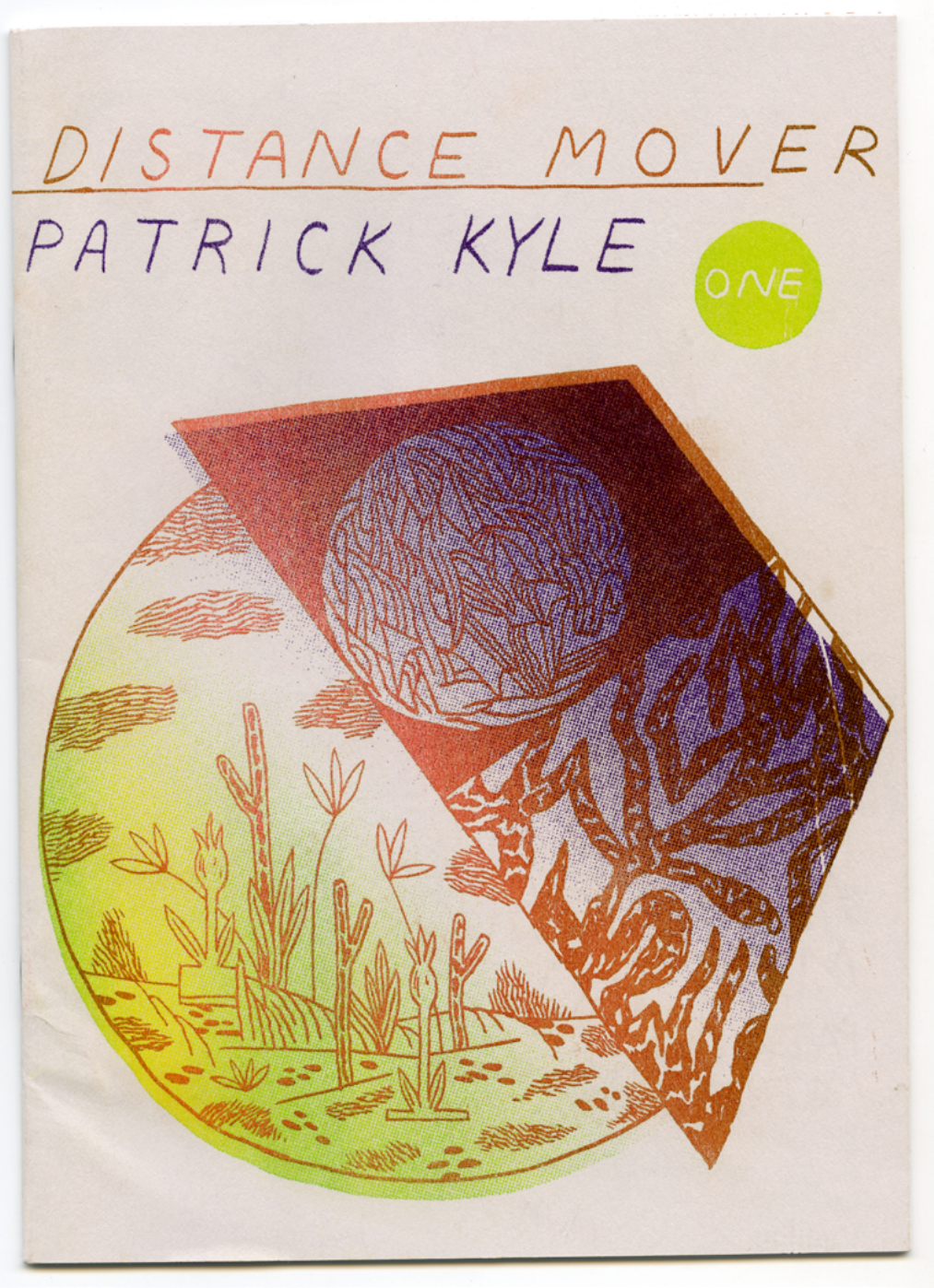
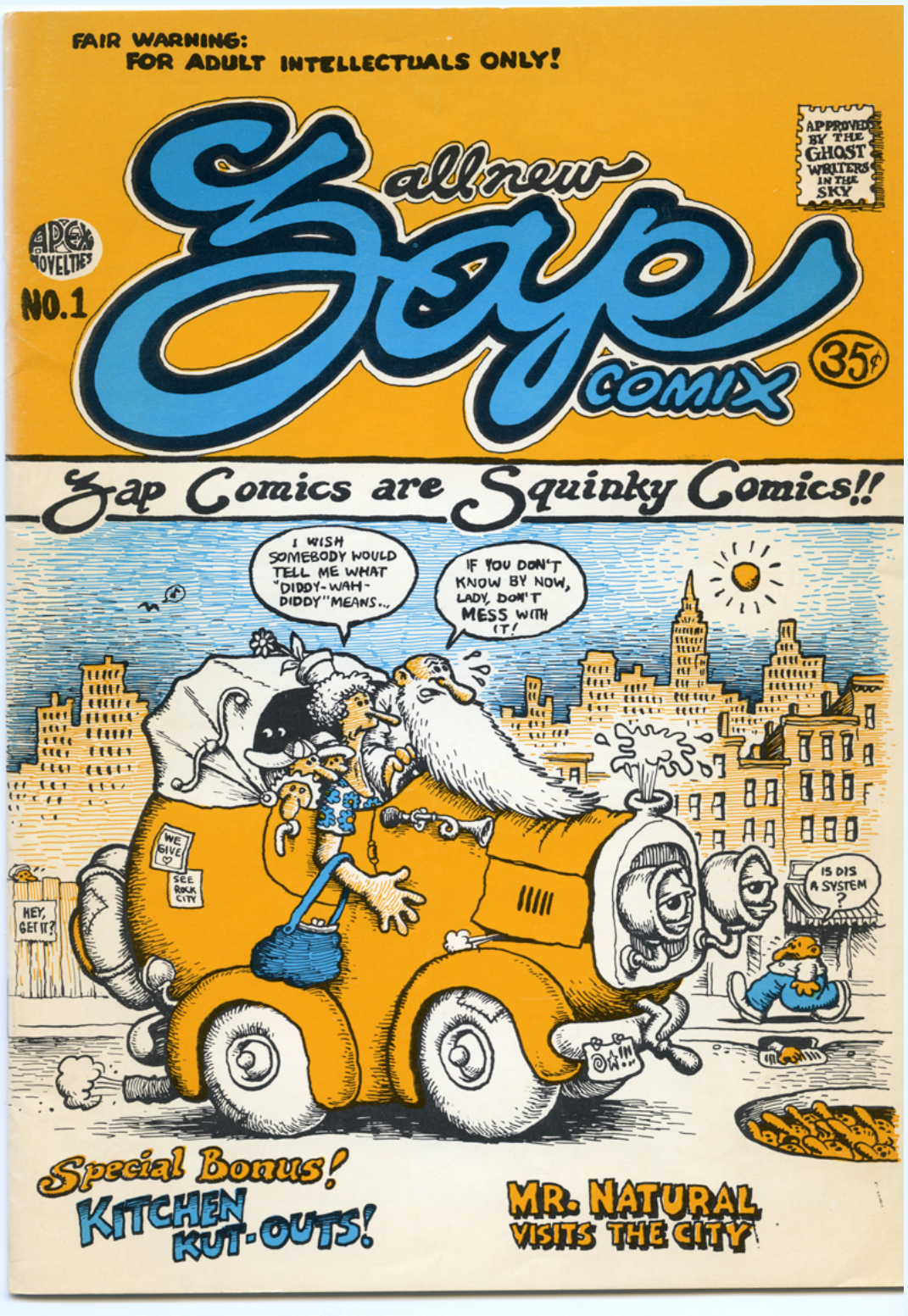
REBECCA NOONE is an artist and a PhD student at the Faculty of Information, University of Toronto. Her quiet, humour-filled interventions interrogate the banal futilities and the muted hopes implicit in our everyday encounters and interactions with information, systems, and technologies. In her work, Noone has asked theoretical physicists how they cope with the mundane, compiled maps of hand-drawn directions collected from helpful passers-by, archived detritus in demolition-slated homes, built an interactive library cataloguing system, compiled a mail-based analogue Internet from deaccessioned library materials, and bartered the periodic table of elements at art and music shows. She has contributed to spaces and exhibitions in Canada, the USA, and Europe including Elsewhere Living Museum in Greensboro, NC; NES in Skagaströnd Iceland; The Luminary in St. Louis, MO; Wreck City in Calgary, AB; and the Long Winter Takeover at the Art Gallery of Ontario.

The Mobile Special Collections and Rare Books Reading Room Workshop

Christian Siroyt



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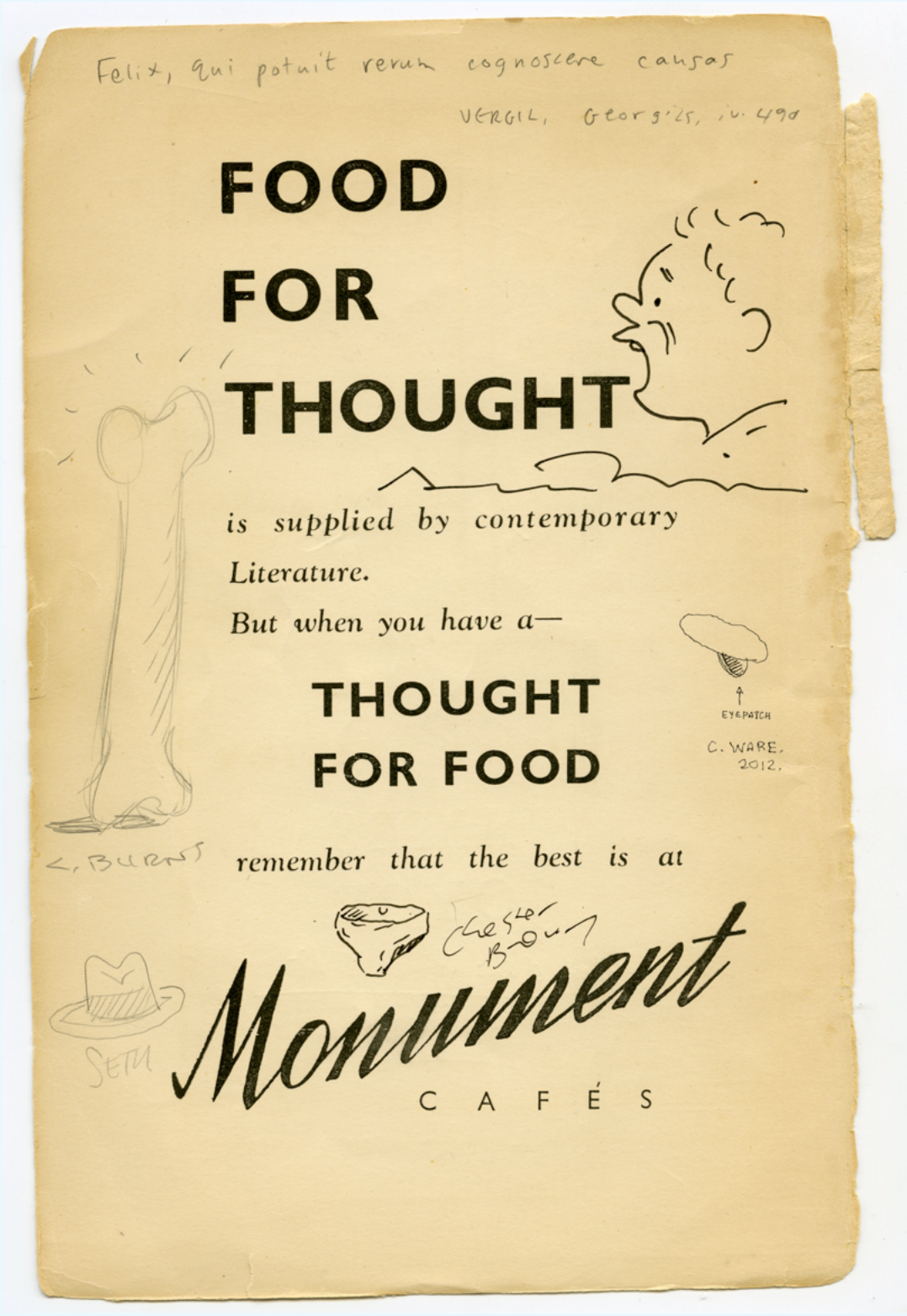
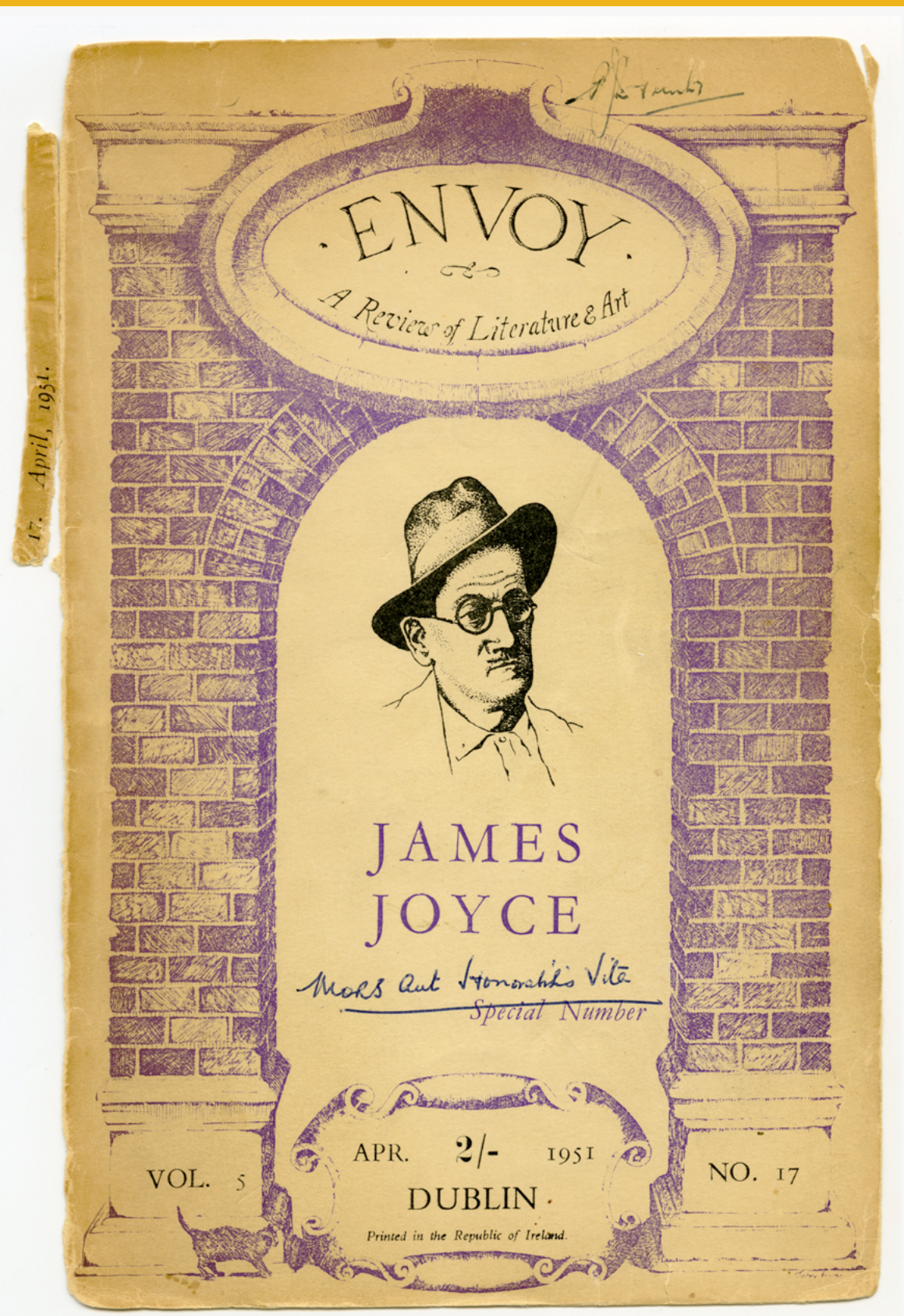
FOR ADULT INTELLECTUALS ONLY!
all new
Zap
COMIX
NO.1
35¢
APPROVED BY THE GHOST WRITERS IN THE SKY
Zap Comics are Squinky Comics!!
I WISH SOMEBODY WOULD TELL ME WHAT "DIDDY-WAH-DIDDY" MEANS...
IF YOU DON'T KNOW BY NOW, LADY, DON'T MESS WITH IT!
WE GIVE ♡ SEE ROCK CITY
HEY, GET IT?
IS DIS A SYSTEM ?
Special Bonus!
KITCHEN KUT-OUTS!
MR. NATURAL VISITS THE CITY


Felix, qui potuit rerum cognoscere causas
VERGIL, Georgics, ii. 490
FOOD FOR THOUGHT
is supplied by contemporary Literature.
But when you have a—
THOUGHT FOR FOOD
EYEPATCH
C. WARE, 2012.
L. BURNS
remember that the best is at
SETH
Monument
CAFÉS



Both images: In the *Inner Cell*, the zero@wavefunction interactive projection shows carbon-60 molecules, familiarly known as buckyballs. The images can be manipulated using a visitor's shadow. Courtesy of Jiacong Yan.

D. F. Theall
Christian
Julien Sivoyt
Trinity College
TORONTO MAXII

A CONCORDANCE TO
Finnegans Wake

Clive Hart

licuit semperque licebit
signatum praesente nota producere nomen
Horace, *Ars poetica*

UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA PRESS, Minneapolis

54.

Apples ^touch to her dot ^acted by Miss Dashe, when I would ~~feel~~ and feel ^most greenily of her. unripe ones as it should ^most unniece prove ^and far too baad to my reputation for daughters-in-trade being lightly clad. And as a mere matter of fact I tell of myself how I popo possess the ripest ~~little~~ littlums wifakie ~~wife~~ around the ~~globes~~ Globelettes ^whom ^streike only on her bux upon which she was raping away first with the consolation prize in my serial dreams of ^Mannequins Passe, fairre women, handicapped by ^(a remarkable little garment. two breasts in opera tops I kickkick keenly love such particularly, while savouring of their flavours at their most perfect best when served ^with heliotrope eyelips, as this is, where I do drench my jolly soul of the pupure of hers past.

She is my bestpreserved wholewife ^Sowell her as herafter in Evans's eye with ^the smallest shoenumber outside chinatins. They are jolly dainty. May we not recommend them? And, alas, our private chaplain ^of Lambeyth and Dolekey, ^an always sadfaced man, who has visited our various hard hearts and reins by imposition of

CHRISTIAN SIROYT is the Exhibits & Programming Coordinator at Museum Strathroy-Caradoc. In 2013 he received his BA from Trinity College in the University of Toronto, where he majored in Book and Media Studies and Literary Studies with German and Cinema Studies. Christian produces films, comics, and literary works from his studio in Strathroy. He is particularly interested in Middle High German literature and the styling of James Joyce. In 2014 Christian established the Comics History Special Collection and the Donald F. Theall Special Collection at Museum Strathroy-Caradoc. He is currently working on two cinematic projects.

An Active Retracing of Siroyt's Reading Room

SAM STRONG

Christian Siroyt's ongoing project, The Mobile Special Collections and Rare Books Reading Room, is perhaps best understood as a kind of intellectual intervention into traditional academic spaces. The title suggests an odd juxtaposition: the authoritative care of "special collections" and "rare books" paired with a spontaneity and hospitality implied by "mobile," as well as the description of the project as a "reading room." This title suggests a striking reconceptualization of what a special collection might be, and how it might be used, which reverberates throughout the project.

This game of juxtaposition extends to the two special collections included in the reading room. Siroyt describes them as follows:

The Comics History Special Collection includes original artwork by Chris Ware, Charles Burns, Marc Bell, Seth, and other notable cartoonists. Rare and important comic books, comics ephemera, and literature about comics are also included.

Professor Donald F. Theall authored The Virtual Marshall McLuhan *and James Joyce's* Technopoetics*, among other scholarly works on multidisciplinary media studies. The Donald F. Theall Special Collection includes a large selection of annotated books from his personal library. Among these are 33 folio volumes of* Finnegans Wake *manuscripts in facsimile, an annotated copy of* Finnegans Wake*, texts on hypermedia, cybernetics, and nonlinear dynamics.*

This heterogeneous collection of contemporary and historical materials troubles the distinction between high and low art, and is reminiscent of the 19th century notion of the Cabinet of Curiosities. It is a collection developed in part by chance, sometimes overlapping in unexpected ways (as with the page from a journal on James Joyce signed by a number of comics luminaries), ultimately drawn from the knowledge of Siroyt himself as creator.

The reading room only truly becomes activated, however, through its intervention into spaces like the Multiple Li(v)es of Art/ists &… conference. Siroyt's workshop during the conference consisted of a space carved out of one of the conference rooms and transformed into a "reading room," where he led a discussion about the collection's materials. Available alongside the books and ephemera from the collections were pens and paper, and participants were invited to draw their own comics in response to the discussion and the larger questions raised during the conference.

The result is a special collection that breaks radically from the common conception of this type of institution. Not only is the arrangement, as noted above, more akin to a cabinet of curiosities, but Siroyt's decision to make the collection "mobile" effects a number of other changes on the collection's use. Where collections are typically places of solitary study and contemplation, here participation takes place, at the very least, within a background of collaboration and discussion. Similarly, the intellectual work of the typical archive, and even the contemporary rush to digitize collections and make them available online, is replaced with a tactile engagement with both the materials of the collection and the materials used to produce new artwork.

This results in the workshop itself becoming a space where the connections between texts can be traced, not just metaphorically but literally as images are copied, sometimes quite exactly, from the texts provided. The tracing of the collection's edges becomes a way of tracing the contours of the conversation and the opening up of the archive in its particular space with a particular group of participants.

Presented here is a brief series of images documenting elements of the collection and the images produced in response to it. These images serve as the physical marker, a tracing of the intervention into the space of the academic conference that Siroyt's project represents, and, potentially, material for future experiments in discourse and alternate forms of archival practice.

SAM STRONG *is an artist, writer and media theorist who completed his MA in Contemporary Art, Design and New Media Art Histories at OCAD University. Despite a background in traditional art and literature, he loves exploring the messages and structural complexities in new media and popular culture. At OCAD University, he is exploring the way in which panel structures in comics influence readers' responses to visual narrative, both semiotically and emotionally.*